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Quick as lightning I saw Fred's right hand raised, and with a "square shoulder hit" such as would have felled an ox, he let it fall full upon Bully's face. Page 236

THE GOLD-HUNTER'S LIBRARY.

GOLD HUNTERS IN AUSTRALIA

BUSH RANGERS

GOLD HUNTERS IN EUROPE

A WHALEMAN'S ADVENTURES.

A SLAVER'S ADVENTURES.

LIFE IN THE EAST INDIES.

Wm. H. Thomes.

GOLD HUNTERS IN AUSTRALIA.

BOSTON,
LEE & SHEPARD.

THE

GOLD HUNTERS' ADVENTURES;

OR,

LIFE IN AUSTRALIA.

BY

WILLIAM H. THOMES

A RETURNED AUSTRALIAN.

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INTRODUCTION.

SINCE my return from Australia, I have been solicited by a number of friends to give them a history of my adventures in that land of gold, where kangaroos are supposed to be as plenty as natives, and jump ten times as far, and where natives are imagined to be continually lying in ambush for the purpose of making a hearty meal upon the bodies of those unfortunate travellers who venture far into the interior of the country — where bushrangers are continually hanging about camp fires, ready to cut the weasands of those who close their eyes for a moment — and lastly, where every other man that you meet is expected to be a convict, transported from the mother country for such petty crimes as forgery, housebreaking, and manslaughter in the second degree.

My friends have all desired to hear me relate these particulars, and have honored me with a large attendance at my rooms, and sat late at night, and drank my wine and water, and smoked my cigars, with a relish that did me great credit, as it showed that I am something of a connoisseur in the choice of such luxuries. And then they laughed so loudly at my jokes, no matter how poor they were, that, for a few days after my arrival home, I really thought the air of Australia had improved and sharpened my wit.

I should, no doubt, have continued feasting those who listened so patiently to my yarns, had not a sudden idea entered my head, one night, when the company were the most boisterous. I was in the act of raising a glass of wine to my mouth, when it occurred to me that before I left this country for Australia, via California, scarcely one of those present had assembled on the dock to bid me farewell.

I placed the untasted wine upon the table again, lighted a cigar, and was soon buried in smoke and reflection. I thought of the time when I had not money enough to pay my passage to the Golden State — of the exertions I had made to raise the amount necessary, and the many

refusals that I had met with at the hands of those who now professed to be my friends.

I blew aside the smoke that enveloped my head, and fixed my eyes upon one red-faced cousin, who owned bank shares, and bought stocks when low, and sold them when a rise had taken place. He had laughed at me for my impertinence in supposing that he could loan me money, and now he was seated at my table, chuckling at my jokes, and swearing, while he helped himself to liquor, that I was the best fellow alive, and that there was nothing but what he would do for me.

Could it be possible that the possession of fifty or sixty thousand dollars had wrought such a change? I was forced to believe it, and I grew sad at the thought, and no more jokes escaped my lips that night; but the company remained as late as usual, and declared by a unanimous vote that they would meet again at the same place the next evening, and hear further particulars.

Before sunset the next day I had changed my apartments, and taken private lodgings with a friend who had visited me but once since my return, and had then refused to accept of the hospitalities that I was disposed to offer him. He had lent me money without security — he had declined taking interest for the same — he had welcomed me on my arrival as warmly as I expected — he did not ask me how much dust I had brought back, and he never said a word about his wish to be repaid the few hundred dollars that he had advanced me when I left home to seek my fortune. When I did offer him the money, and thrust a diamond ring upon his finger as a token of my esteem, he blushed like a young school girl, and declared that he didn't deserve it.

At his house, then, I took up my abode; and while his family treat me with respect, they possess none of the fawning which characterizes my other friends. As the latter have frequently expressed their sorrow for my sudden removal, and their anxiety to know what events befell me in the mines of Australia, I have come to the conclusion that I would put them in print; and now those who used to drink my liquor and feast at my table will learn how I acquired my fortune, and then, if so disposed, they can follow in my footsteps and gain a competence for themselves.

This much I have told the reader in confidence, and with the hope that it will not be repeated, as my red-faced cousin, who every day is to be seen on 'Change, might be seriously angry if he was suspected of mercenary motives. With this introduction I will commence my narrative.

LIFE IN AUSTRALIA;

OR,

A GOLD HUNTER'S ADVENTURES.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST THOUGHTS OF GOING TO AUSTRALIA. — DEPARTURE FROM CALIFORNIA. — LIFE ON BOARD SHIP. — ARRIVAL AT WILLIAMS TOWN. — DESCRIPTION OF MELBOURNE. — A CONVICT'S HUT.

IT was as hot an afternoon on the banks of the American Fork as ever poor mortals could be subjected to and still retain sufficient vitality to draw their breath. Under a small tent, stretched upon their backs, with shirt collars unbuttoned, boots off, and a most languid expression upon their faces, were two men — both of them of good size, with a fair display of muscle, broad-chested, hands hard and blackened with toil, yet not badly formed; for had they been but covered with neat fitting gloves, and at an opera, ladies might have thought they were small.

These two men, one of whom was reading a newspaper, while the other was trying to take a *siesta*, were Frederick Button, and his faithful companion, the writer of these adventures, whom we will distinguish by the name of Jack, as it is both familiar and common, and has the merit of being short.

As I was reading the paper, the contents of which interested me, I paid but little attention to my friend, until I suddenly laid it down, and said, —

"Fred, let's go to Australia."

"Go to the d——l," he replied, turning on his side, his back towards me, and uttering a long w-h-e-w, as though he had found it difficult to catch his breath, it was so hot.

"We should find it hotter in the regions of his Satanic Majesty than here; but that is something that concerns you alone, as no doubt you are fully aware."

Fred uttered a grunt — he was too warm to laugh, and I again returned to the charge.

"Gold mines have been discovered in Australia, and ships are up at San Francisco for Melbourne. A party of twenty left there last week, and more are to follow."

There was no reply, and I continued: —

"It is stated in this paper that a man took out a lump of gold weighing one hundred and twenty pounds, and that he had been but ten days in the mines when he found it."

"What?" cried Fred, suddenly sitting up, and wiping the perspiration from his brow.

I repeated the statement.

"It's a d——d lie," cried Fred.

"Then let's go and prove it so."

"How's the climate in that part of the world — hot or cold?"

"About the same as here."

Fred meditated for a few minutes, lighted his pipe, and smoked on in silence; and as there was nothing better to do, I joined him.

"We are not making a fortune here in California, and if we don't do any thing in Australia, we shall see the country, and that will be worth something," I said.

"Then let's go," cried Fred, refilling his pipe; and that very evening we commenced selling our stock of superfluous articles to our numerous neighbors, saving nothing but tent, revolvers, rifles, and a few other articles that would stand us in need when we reached Australia.

A week from the day that we made up our mind to try what luck there was in store for us in Australia, we were on board of a clipper ship, and with some two dozen other steerage passengers (for Fred and myself were determined to be economical) we were passing through the Golden Gate on our way to a strange land, where we did not possess a friend or acquaintance that we knew of.

"Well," said Fred, as he stood on deck at the close of the day, and saw the mountains of California recede from view, "it's precious little fun I've seen in that country; and if our new home is not more exciting, I shall be like the Irishman who pined away because he couldn't get up a fight."

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness on that score," replied the mate, who chanced to overhear the remark. "I'll warrant that you'll see as many musses as you'll care to mix in."

"Then, Australia, thou art my home," cried Fred, with a theatrical wave of his hand, as though bidding adieu to the Golden State forever.

Fred was one of the most peaceable men in the world, and never commenced a quarrel; but when once engaged in a conflict, he was like a lion, and would as soon think of yielding as the royal beast.

For nearly fifty days did we roll on the Pacific, amusing ourselves by playing at "all fours," speculating on the chances of our arrival, and making small wagers on the day that we should drop anchor; and after we had all lost and won about an equal amount, we were one morning overjoyed by the sight of land. Standing boldly in towards a low coast, with no signs of a harbor, it was not until we were within half a mile of the shore that we discovered a narrow entrance that opened into Hobson's Bay; when we dropped anchor opposite to a town consisting of a dozen or twenty houses, and over one of them floated the flag of England.

"Well, Mr. Mate," asked Fred, as the men went aloft to furl sails, "do you call that densely-populated city Melbourne?"

"That!" replied the mate, with a look of contempt at the scattered houses. "That be d——d. That's Williams Town. Melbourne is a fine city, seven miles from here, and where all the luxuries of life can be obtained; but tobacco is the dearest one—so be careful of your weed."

As the officers of the custom house were even then coming on board, we thanked him for the hint, and put ours out of their reach.

Williams Town is situated at the mouth of the River Zarra, on Hobson's Bay, and at one time actually threatened to become a place of considerable importance; but the water for domestic use was too bad to be tolerated, and most of those who had settled there were glad to retrace their steps to Melbourne, where a better sort of article exists.

"How are the mines? Do they still hold out?" I inquired of one of the crew of the custom house boat, who was leaning against the rail in a languid manner, as though he had been overworked for the past six months.

"Yes, I s'pose so," he answered; and he spoke as though each word cost him an immense amount of labor.

"Then, Fred, we are in luck," I cried, turning to my partner who stood near at hand.

"Intend going to the mines?" the man asked, with a sudden show of interest.

"Such is our intention," I replied.

"'Mericans, I suppose," he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then don't go if you want to keep the number of your mess," the boatman said.

"Why not?" Fred ventured to inquire.

"'Cos they kill Yankees at the mines. Jim," he continued, turning to a comrade, "how many 'Mericans were killed week afore last at Ballarat?"

"O, I don't know," replied the individual referred to. "A dozen or twenty, I believe. Might have been more or less. I'm not 'ticular within a man or two."

"Thank you for your information," cried Fred. "And now one question more. Can you tell me how many Englishmen were killed by those same Americans, before they died?"

This question appeared to astonish the men; for they looked at each other, and then examined Fred with scrutinizing glances.

"I guess he'll do," they said, at length; and finding that we were not to be frightened, they turned their attention to passengers more credulous, and actually made some of them believe what they said was true.

The next morning we hired a boat to take our luggage to the wharf, where the steamers, which ply between Sydney, Geelong, and Melbourne, stop. Our traps did not amount to much, as we had no money to spare for freighting, and when we first stepped upon the soil of Australia, our worldly possessions consisted of four shirts, do. pants, two pairs of boots, blankets, tents, &c., the whole weighing just one hundred and fifty pounds—not a large amount, but sufficient for two men, whose wants were easily supplied.

There were a dozen rough, loaferish looking men, whiling away their time upon the wharf; but as they confined themselves to simply asking

a few questions as to what part of the world we came from, and received satisfactory answers, they soon lost all interest in us, and began to speculate what time the steamer would arrive.

She did not reach the dock until noon; and as we had seen enough of Williams Town, we readily embarked, and in an hour's time were at Melbourne, gazing with interest at every thing that met our view.

The city was full of life and business: heaps of goods were exposed ready for transportation to the mines, and large, lumbering carts of English build were crawling slowly through the streets, drawn by five and six yoke of oxen, while the drivers, armed with whips, the lashes of which were of immense length, though the stock or handle was barely two and a-half feet long, whirled them over the frightened animals' heads, and whenever they struck the poor brutes, a small, circular piece of skin was taken out, leaving the quivering flesh exposed to the sun, and a prey for the numerous insects that hovered in the air.

We carried our stuff on shore, and then considered what was necessary to get to the mines; and while we rested upon our bundles, and ate a portion of the salt junk and biscuit that the cook of the ship had insisted upon our taking with us, we took a calm survey of Melbourne — its advantages and disadvantages. The city occupies two sides of a valley, called East Hill and West Hill, and is well laid out.

The streets are broad, unpaved, and formed so that during the heavy rains the water will centre into the gutters, which are flagged with a substantial kind of stone to prevent the sidewalks from washing away during the rainy season, when the gutters resemble small mountain torrents, and enough head is obtained to carry half a dozen sawmills.

At the place where we landed there is barely sufficient room for the steamer to turn round for the bay, or arm, of the River Zarra is small, and the water shoal. Every available place near the landing was crowded, however, with crafts of all descriptions, from the light-draughted schooner to huge launches, with loads of goods which they had received from ships lying in Hobson's Bay. Altogether, the scene reminded one very much of San Francisco; and so our spirits rose as we contemplated the bustle going on.

"Well, my men, are you in want of work?" asked a well-dressed elderly gentleman, who had arrived in a carriage driven by a coachman in livery, and a footman, dressed in the same garb. He appeared to own every thing that he looked at; for we had seen half a dozen men take his orders, and then proceed to obey them with alacrity.

"We thought we'd try the mines first," I replied, in answer to his question.

"Hard work — hard work," he said, with a smile. "Americans, I see — smart men in that country. Hope you'll do well here. Afraid not if you go to the mines. Want men to help get these goods under shelter. Like to employ you;" and off he bustled.

"A pretty good sort of man, I guess," remarked Fred.

"I say, stranger," I asked, turning to a person with a cartman's frock on, who was seated on a box smoking a pipe, "can you tell me who that gentleman is?"

"I didn't see any gentleman," he answered, without even taking his pipe from his mouth.

"Why, I mean the one who just spoke to us — the man with the white vest and gold buttons."

"Him — he's a ticket-of-leave man, and has more money than half of the merchants in Melbourne," replied the cartman.

"What, that man a convict?" I asked, with surprise.

"Just so — transported for fourteen years for house-breaking. Behaved himself, and so got liberty to enter into business; and now he is at the top of the heap. In two years his time will be out, and then he can stay or go where he pleases."

After this piece of news the convict became an object of curiosity to us, and we watched him until he entered his carriage and drove off, his coachman treating him with as much respect as he would the governor general.

"I say," asked Fred of our new acquaintance, "do all convicts get rich? Because if they do I want to become one as soon as possible."

"Not all," replied the man; "but some blunder into luck, and others are shrewd and look after the chances. I don't suppose I shall ever be rich, although I am doing pretty well."

"And are you a——"

I didn't like to say convict, and so I hesitated.

"O, yes; I was sentenced to ten years' transportation for writing another man's name instead of my own on a piece of paper."

"That is forgery."

The convict smiled, as much as to say, you have hit it, and continued to smoke his pipe with infinite satisfaction.

"I should like to know if the company we are likely to meet in the mines are of the same class?" muttered Fred.

"Most of them," replied the man, who appeared to be a man of education; "and you'll find them more honest than those never sentenced, because they know that their freedom depends upon their reputation."

We sat staring at our informant for some time; but after a while he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and arose as though going.

"If you want your traps taken to the mines at a reasonable rate, I'll do it for you, as I start to-morrow with a load of goods for Ballarat," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

"Is that mine productive?" we asked.

"It's as rich as any of them. You may sink a shaft and strike a vein, and you may get nothing. It's all a lottery."

We consulted together for a few minutes, and concluded to try our fortunes at Ballarat, and so signified to our acquaintance.

"Then shoulder your traps, and I'll show you my shanty. You can sleep there to-night, and, let me tell you, it's a favor that I wouldn't grant to half of my countrymen."

As we considered pride out of place in that country, we readily accepted his offer, and in a few minutes were walking through the streets of Melbourne with a convicted felon.

We found his hut to be built of rough boards, with but one room; and the furniture consisted of a stove, wooden benches, a pine table, and a curiosity in the shape of a bedstead.

That night we learned more of the customs of the Australians from

our host, who gave the name of Smith as the one which he was to be called by, than we should have found out by a six months' residence.

Over a bottle of whiskey, which was made in Yankeeland, we spent our first night in Australia.

"Come," said Smith, about ten o'clock, "it's time we were asleep, for we start early in the morning, and before to-morrow night you'll not feel as fresh as you do at present."

As he spoke he removed the whiskey, and in half an hour deep snoring was the only sound of life in the convict's hut.

CHAPTER II.

A Morning in Australia. — Journey to the Mines of Ballarat. — The Convict's Story. — Black Darnley, the Bush-ranger.

"Hallo!" cried a gruff voice, accompanied by a gentle shake, which was sufficient to arouse Fred and myself from a deep sleep, that was probably caused by the whiskey.

The time had passed so swiftly that it did not seem an hour since we had first stretched ourselves upon our blankets on the floor.

We rubbed our eyes and sat up, looking around the Australian's hut, almost fancying that we were still dreaming. A spluttering tallow candle was dimly burning, stuck in the neck of a porter bottle, and a fire was lighted in the old broken stove, on which was hissing a spider filled with small bits of beef and pieces of potatoes. A sauce pan was doing duty for a coffee-pot, and the fragrant berry was agreeable to the nostrils of hungry men. Our host, the convict Smith, after he had aroused us, seated himself upon a three-legged stool, and was busily employed stirring up the savory mess, and trying to make a wheezy pipe draw; and as the tobacco which he was smoking was damp, and the meat was liable to burn, his time was fully occupied.

"Come, rouse up," Smith said, when he saw that we were awake; and while he spoke, he was trying to coax a coal into the pipe, but it obstinately refused to go.

"We'll be off in an hour's time; so I'm getting a little bit of breakfast ready before we start. Get up, and help me set the table."

We rolled up our blankets, and in a few minutes had drawn the rough table to the middle of the room, and placed thereupon our tin plates and quart pots.

As breakfast was not quite ready, I strolled out of doors, and found that the first streaks of daylight were just visible, and the stars looked white and silverish. There were no clouds to obscure the sight, and for a short time I stood watching the gradual changes that were taking place as the sun edged its way towards the horizon. First long streaks of a bright golden color were extended like huge arms, and then they

changed to a subdued pink tint that defied the art of a painter to transfer to canvas. Glorious are the views to be obtained in Australia at sunrise, and if those of Italy excel them, it must indeed be a land for poets and painters.

A heavy dew had fallen during the night, and refreshed the aromatic plants that sprouted beneath my feet; and as they were crushed by my heavy tread, they yielded up their life with a perfumed breath that filled the air with fragrance, and made me regret that I had no other means of locomotion beside my feet.

The heavy rumbling of carts over the dry streets was heard, and an occasional crack of the dreadful whip and the fierce shout of the driver proved that there were others stirring as early as ourselves.

"Breakfast is ready," shouted Fred from the door of the hut; and I retraced my steps to the home of the convict, whom I found still sucking his pipe and pouring out the coffee.

Our meal was soon over, for the delicacy of civilized life was not particularly observed, and our long seclusion from the society of females had rendered us little better than savages, as far as manners were concerned.

"Now, then, pack up your traps, and be ready for a start. I'll be along here with my team in half an hour, as my freight is already loaded."

"But we shall need provisions for the route," I said.

"Of course you will; but as I have to take some for myself, I'll get a quantity for you also, and charge just what I pay. At Ballarat you'll find enough to eat, and men to trust you if short of money."

Smith left to get his cattle, and while absent we washed the tin pans and got all ready for a start. Our rifles were reloaded, and revolvers examined, and after we had indulged in the luxury of a smoke, we heard the voice of the convict shouting in no gentle tones to his oxen, as they stopped in front of the hut.

"All ready?" asked Smith, coiling up his long whip, at the sight of which the cattle fairly trembled, and pricked up their ears as though ready for a stampede.

"All ready," we answered, bringing out our traps and lashing them on the team.

The coffee pot and skillet were not forgotten, as we calculated if we met any game they would both be of service. A keg of water, a bottle of whiskey, a bag of ship bread, a large piece of pork, a few potatoes, coffee, a bag of flour, and a bag of sugar, were the articles needed for our long journey to the mines of Ballarat.

Smith locked the door of his hut, hung the key about his neck attached to a thick cord, and then, uncoiling his dreadful whip, he sounded the signal for an advance.

The cattle strained at their yokes, and the huge, clumsy, English-built team creaked over the road, and groaned as though offering strong remonstrance against the journey.

There were five yoke of oxen attached to the cart, and as they were in fair condition and had not been worked for a few days, they took the load along the level road at a brisk walk; and it was not until we had got beyond the city's limits and left Melbourne in the distance, that the animals fell into their accustomed steady walk.

"I suppose that there is but little use in our carrying our rifles in our hands?" I asked of Smith, as he walked by the side of the cattle.

"I have been waiting for you to ask the question ever since we left Melbourne," Smith replied; "I thought I wouldn't say any thing until you got tired of carrying them. There is but little fear of our meeting with bushrangers so near the city; and as for game, we may see some, but not within rifle range. Put your guns in the cart, and don't touch them until we camp to-night."

We gladly followed his advice, for the sun had risen, and began scorching us with its rays, although, when we started, the air was quite cool, and a jacket was not uncomfortable.

"How far is Geelong from Melbourne?" I asked, after we had relieved ourselves of the rifles.

"Between fifty and sixty miles."

"Do we pass near the town?"

"No, we branch off near Mount Macedonskirt, the range of mountains by that name, and which you can see in the distance; cross a barren tract of country, where no water but sink-holes is to be found for forty miles; strike the mines of Victoria; and then we are near the gold fields of Ballarat."

"Where I hope we shall make a fortune and return to Melbourne in less than six months," Fred cried.

"Amen," ejaculated Smith; but he smiled as he thought what a slight chance there was of our prayers being answered.

We met some half a dozen teams on their way back to Melbourne from the mines, and we surveyed the drivers as we would rare animals, for they were covered with a thick coating of white dust that had filled their hair and whiskers, and looked as though a bushel of corn meal had been scattered over their heads.

Each cart contained two or more invalids, who appeared, by their dejected air, to have taken farewell of the world, and didn't think it worth while attempting to live any longer; and when a question was asked them, it was with great reluctance that they returned an answer, and if they did speak, it was in tones so faint that with difficulty they could be understood.

Three times did the convict stop his cart to supply some little luxury to the invalids; and while he declined payment for his refreshments, it did not prevent him from requesting the sick men to say, when they reached Melbourne, that they had been befriended by himself. We were struck by this peculiarity, and as soon as the teams moved on, we resolved to inquire the reason.

"Why are you so particular that those men should mention your name for the charities that you perform?" asked Fred.

Smith smiled, but it was of the melancholy sort of mirth, and did not come from his heart. He hesitated, as though considering whether he should make a full expression or reserve his confidence. At length he said, —

"I told you that I was sentenced to transportation for ten years. Five of them have passed, and I am at liberty to trade on my own account, yet liable at any moment to be remanded back to my old station, and work worse than a slave on the docks, or at any menial employment.

I have so far managed very well. I have saved money, and own shares in the Royal Bank of Melbourne, besides two good houses that are paying me a large percentage. The property is mine, and government cannot touch a penny of it; yet I would willingly give all that I possess to be at liberty to call myself a free man, and to know that I am no longer watched by those in power. When I received my sentence I determined upon the course I would adopt. I never murmured at my work, no matter how disagreeable it was — I was respectful and obedient, and after a year's hardship I was favorably reported at head quarters, and was then allowed to live with a man who kept cattle, and had made a fortune as a drover. I served him faithfully for two years, and upon his report I was allowed a ticket of leave, and commenced business for myself. I am comparatively a free man; but if any unfavorable report should be heard concerning me, farewell to my present liberty. For five long years I should be used like a brute, and before my term expired I should be in a felon's grave; for a man must possess a constitution of iron to endure the tasks that are inflicted upon a convict remanded back to the tender mercies of overseers whose hearts are harder than the ball and chain which many of their prisoners wear."

"And you really think that the relief you afford to those returned miners will be heard of, and that it will mitigate your sentence?"

"Certainly. The poor fellows will go to the hospital, and while there I shall be held in grateful remembrance. The physician will hear of my name, and one of these days I hope to receive a full pardon. But whether I do or not, I shall be conscious that I have done my duty, and in some measure atoned for the crime that I committed."

Smith cracked his long whip to let the oxen know that he was not asleep, and the cattle, rousing from their snail pace at the sound of the scourge, accelerated their steps, and strained at their yokes as though they would tear them from their necks.

We remained silent while getting over a mile of the dusty road; but, as the oxen fell into their slow pace again, we renewed the conversation.

"You think that the system of letting convicts have leave tickets is a good one, then?" we asked.

"In some cases I think that it works well; but all men are not alike, and while some play the hypocrite and profess good conduct, others are never allowed their liberty because they brood over their past life so much that they never smile. They are marked as sullen and discontented, and are worked until their spirits are broken, and they no longer hope for freedom. The energy and enterprise of liberated felons have increased the trade of Australia until she is no longer a burden to the mother country, and I hope, before I die, to see this island conducted as an independent government. It would be better for England, and I need not tell you how much better it would be for us."

"Are the bushrangers, that we hear so much about, really dangerous fellows to meet?" we asked.

"They are the very scum of the great cities of England — desperate men who are usually sentenced for life, and therefore have no hope of mercy; and many of them desire none. As soon as they can effect an escape they do so, and fleeing to the wilds of the island, either join a band of ruffians like themselves, or else, fearful of trusting to men that

are as treacherous as wolves, will roam without companions for many days, living upon sheep, which are easily obtained from herds without the knowledge of the shepherds, and very often with their consent, to be at last betrayed and shot by the very man who was trusted most. There are hundreds of them upon the very route that we must take, and every day there are murders and robberies committed, and all the vigilance of the guard, who escort gold dust from the mines to Melbourne, is necessary to insure its protection.

"Teams like our own, however, are most attended to, and if we should wake up in the night, and by the light of the camp fire see half a dozen ferocious-looking fellows standing over us, it would be better to let them take what they want, and go their way in peace, than to trust to an appeal to arms or oppose them. Once rouse them to anger, and our lives would not be worth a sixpence; for they think no more of shedding the blood of a man than they would that of a sheep."

"I think it would be better to give them a trial than be robbed, especially when we possess weapons like these," cried Fred, touching his revolver, which he carried in a belt around his waist.

Smith looked at my companion for a moment in silence, as though trying to satisfy himself whether Fred was in earnest, or only talking because danger was remote.

"I've carried many men to the mines," he said at length, "and been robbed some half a dozen times; but I always found that while my passengers were firm for resistance at the beginning of the journey, yet at night a different opinion was formed, and the boldest has consented to give up a shirt or pair of boots without a murmur."

Fred laughed good naturedly, and spoke jestingly in reply.

"That was because you never freighted Americans. Englishmen may consent to have their boots pulled off, but Yankees would be apt to remonstrate."

"I hope that we shall have no occasion to test your courage," said Smith; "but if we meet Black Darnley, I shall not blame you for keeping quiet."

"And who is Black Darnley?" we asked.

"An escaped convict, who has been at large for three years; and, in spite of the two hundred pounds reward, no one has ventured to attempt his capture. He swears that he will never be taken alive, and he will keep his word. He has no fear of two or even three ordinary men, for he possesses the strength of a Hercules and the desperation of a wounded tiger. Of all the bushrangers on the island, he is the worst; and yet he always treats me well, and lets me pass without levying toll, for he and I are old acquaintances, and often have a social chat together about times gone by."

"Tell us where you first met him," we said, crowding nearer the convict to hear his story.

"Wait until we halt for a rest and feed the cattle. Half a mile from here is a small stream of water, and under the shade of some trees near at hand, we'll boil our coffee, and then I'll tell you about my first meeting with Black Darnley."

As it was about noon, and we had travelled near twelve miles, the proposed halt was any thing but disagreeable. Besides, the sun was

nearly overhead, burning and scorching us with its intense rays, and causing the oxen to protrude their tongues and drag their weary feet along as though they hardly possessed life enough to reach the water spoken of.

A sharp crack of Smith's whip and the cattle started into life again; and as he continued to flourish the dreaded lash over their heads, they kept up their speed until we reached the stream, which slowly trickled through dry plains, with scorched grass and withered shrubs; but, near the banks of the river, which during the rainy season became a mighty torrent, green trees and rank grass afforded an agreeable shade from the burning sun.

The cattle were unyoked, and allowed to wander where they pleased, Smith being confident of finding them near the water when he got ready to start.

"Black Darnley, as he is called, owing to his swarthy complexion," began Smith, after a fire was made, and water for the coffee started to boiling, "was transported in the same ship as myself; but our conduct during the passage to Australia was widely different. He was rebellious, and I docile. He was half the time wearing irons, and when free from fetters endeavoring to create a mutiny. I never meditated any such project, and threatened one time to disclose his plans if he did not give them up.

"He swore vengeance against me, and after that I always avoided him. Six different times during the passage he was severely flogged, and when that was found to have no effect, he was starved into a respectful demeanor; but as soon as he had recruited his exhausted strength, he would again commence his old career of insolence, and once more be punished. He is a strong man, and stands nearly six feet six, with shoulders broad and arms covered with muscle, while not a pound of surplus flesh is on his body. Before he committed the crime for which he was transported, he was a prize-fighter; but having lost a battle, he turned his attention to house-breaking, as an agreeable diversion from his former course of life. He was betrayed by a comrade, and sentenced for fourteen years. He will never live to see his sentence expire; for, cunning as he is, his day of capture will not long be delayed.

"Upon our arrival at Sydney, he was branded with a black mark against his name, and the most laborious work was his daily task, besides the privilege of dragging a chain and ball after him. He managed to secrete a knife about his person one day, and when the guard the next morning ordered him to perform some heavy work, he struck the man to the heart with his weapon, broke his chain, and fled.

"A horse standing near the dock where he was employed, he mounted, and escaping the shower of balls that flew after him, and defying all opposition, he reached the wilds of Australia.

"It was a bold strike for liberty, and only one time in a thousand could it be achieved.

"Before he effected his escape I had been taken into the service of a man who owned large herds of sheep, and on one of his immense tracts of land was I stationed to look after a flock of nearly ten thousand. I in fact became a stockman, and lived a solitary life, with no one

to speak to unless it was to those who brought me a few necessary articles once a month, and then departed to supply other stations.

"I was not discontented with my lot, and yet at times I longed to see a human face and hear a voice speak in my native tongue. I used to receive visits occasionally from the miserable natives, who hang around a sheep station; but as I never encouraged their intrusions, and watched their doings with a sharp eye, they generally avoided me. Twice they tried to murder me, but I was wary and escaped.

"The hut in which I lived was built of logs, plastered on the outside with clay to keep out the rain, and contained one room, with a fireplace, a bed made of sheep skins, a table and two stools. The door was a stout one, made expressly to resist a siege in case the natives grew vicious, and was secured on the inside by a large bar.

"I have been thus particular in my description of my habitation, because one night, when the rain was pouring down in torrents, and the wind beat against the hut as though it would take it from its foundation, I was startled by hearing a loud knock at the door.

"I had been sitting before the fire for a long time, trying to picture out my future life, for my past was already too well known, when the summons disturbed me. I started to my feet, and sought the door, where my dog was already snuffing and uttering angry growls, as though suspicious that the person on the outside was not exactly such a guest as his master would wish for in that lonely habitation. While I was uncertain what to do, another knock, louder than the first, startled the dog into a howl; but I hushed his noise, and taking down my gun, that hung over my bed, I asked what was wanted.

"'In the name of God give me shelter,' cried a voice that I thought I recognized, although I could not call to mind where I had heard it.

"'Who are you?' I asked.

"'A stranger who has been to various stations for the purpose of buying cattle, and has lost his way. Give me shelter for the night, and God will reward you.'

"The latter part of the solicitation sounded as though uttered in a hypocritical tone, and I was undecided whether to comply with the request, or send him to the next station, about ten miles distant. A fresh gust of wind influenced me; I slipped off the bar and opened the door; but next moment I would have given all the sheep under my charge to have had my guest where he was five minutes previous, with the oak bar across the door; for by the flickering fire that blazed upon the hearth I saw that my visitor was Black Darnley.

"He was greatly altered since I had seen him last. His clothes hung in tatters about his body, while his large feet were shoeless and bleeding profusely; but the fire of his black eyes was unquenched, and the bony form, still upright in spite of the hard labor to which he had been subjected, gave assurance, to my dismay, that he still possessed his giant strength.

"The instant he entered the hut he closely scrutinized my face, and then cast hurried glances around the room to see if I were alone. Satisfied that I was, he strode to the fire, and seated himself near its cheerful blaze.

"'I have seen your face somewhere,' he said, looking at me keenly.

"'I should think you would remember it,' I replied, 'for we were both passengers in the same ship.'

"He started up with a fearful oath, and would have rushed upon me; but I brought my gun to my shoulder, and kept him at bay.

"'I remember you now,' he said, and seemed inclined to dash at me in spite of the weapon which I held in my hand. 'You are the one that threatened to betray me when I wished to take the ship. I swore to have your life for your cowardice; but I retract the oath, and now let us be friends. Give me shelter, and something to eat, and to-morrow I will leave you for a distant station.'

"'You are deceiving me,' I said, still retaining my hold of the gun, and looking at him suspiciously.

"'No, by ——, I'm not,' Darnley cried, with a look of sincerity: 'here, let me prove it. Ten days ago I murdered one of the guards, and fought my way to this part of the country in hopes of joining a gang of bushrangers. Since that time I have been pursued and hunted like a wild beast; but they haven't captured Black Darnley yet.'

"He laughed triumphantly as he spoke, and thought of the long chase that he had given the police of Sydney.

"'You are a strong man, much stronger than myself, and if I am upon an equal footing with you, could crush me as easily as an eggshell.'

"I still retained my hold of the gun, but I no longer covered his huge body with its barrel.

"'Look at me!' he said, baring his arms, which were shrunken, and holding them up for my inspection. 'For three days I've not tasted food, or closed my eyes in sleep. I've run and skulked from tree to tree during that time, and heard the tramping of horses as the policemen strove to follow my trail. I am weak, exhausted, and a child could overcome me now.'

"'But after your strength is recruited, you may act the part of a serpent, and sting the one that warmed you into life,' I answered, half resolved to trust him.

"'I don't blame you for your suspicions,' he cried, moodily, seating himself by the fire again, and holding his hands towards the blaze to dry his ragged shirt. 'I am defenceless, and you hold a loaded gun. Discharge its contents into my body, and then go and obtain a full pardon from government for the murder of Black Darnley.'

"He bowed his head and sat scowling at the fire, as though he cared not what became of him, and was rather anxious, than otherwise, that I should end his career of crime.

"'I'll trust you,' I said, replacing my gun over the bed and taking a seat beside him, and I did so with perfect confidence.

"'Your clothes are wet and ragged,' I remarked, after a few moments' silence, during which he did not remove his eyes from the fire.

"'A starving man cares but little about his dress,' he answered, glancing over his ragged suit, and stooping to wipe the gravel from his bloody feet.

"'You shall have all that you want to eat,' I answered; and I hastily put a kettle of water upon the fire to make him a cup of tea, and then laid upon the table nearly the whole carcass of a lamb which I had roasted that day. He still sat by the fire and gazed at the flames as

though he read his past life amid the coals that glowed upon the hearth, and was trying to read the future. I went to my small stock of clothing and took out a flannel shirt and pair of trousers, much the worse for wear, but still warm and dry.

"'Strip off your wet garments,' I said, 'and accept of these.'

"He started, and looked me full in the face, as though reading my thoughts.

"'I have wronged you,' he cried, while doing as I directed. 'I thought when I proposed to take the ship, that you were a coward, because you refused to join me. You are a braver man than myself.'

"'It was because I knew that certain death not only awaited you and I, but half of those who were not aware of the plot. The innocent and guilty would have been massacred without mercy by our task-masters.'

"'But we could have slain half a dozen of them before dying ourselves,' he exclaimed, with a touch of his old fierceness, and a wave of his long arms, as though, even then, weak as he was, he would like to strangle his oppressors. I made no reply, but assisted him to dress; and after he had squeezed his body into my clothes, which were two sizes too small for him, the water on the fire boiled, and I made a strong cup of tea, and then bade him eat to repletion. He needed no second invitation, but fell to work like a wild animal, and crauched bones and flesh between his strong teeth in such a ravenous manner that I had expectations of his choking himself; and I don't know that I should have been sorry if he had. The lamb rapidly disappeared, but not until every bone was picked, and half-eaten, did he evince that he was satisfied, and again drew towards the fire, into which he continued to gaze until he began to nod with weariness.

"'You are sleepy,' I said. 'Occupy my bed to-night, and I'll sit by the fire.'

"'The floor will do for me. Give me a sheep-skin and let me stretch myself before the fire.'

"Finding that he was resolved not to deprive me of the bed, I spread half a dozen skins upon the hearth, and giving him a pipe well filled with tobacco, retired to my couch, and lay watching his huge form by the faint flicker of the fire, which had begun to grow dim.

"In a few minutes Darnley's head, which he had supported upon his hand, sank upon his pillow; the pipe dropped from his mouth, and by his heavy breathing I knew that he slept. Wicked thoughts then crowded upon my mind. Within my reach was a gun, well charged with slugs, and there, lying upon the hearth, was an escaped convict, whose life was forfeited by the laws of Australia, and pardon and official patronage granted to any man that shed his blood. Nay, more, I had the means of purchasing my freedom by exhibiting proofs that I had taken his life, and I thought of the many years that must elapse before my term would expire.

"I reached towards the gun, and considered that I should but do my duty in slaying him as he lay; but other thoughts succeeded, and I now thank God that my hands are not stained with the blood of a man who trusted to my goodness of heart. I fell asleep during my meditations, and when I awoke, Darnley was still sleeping in front of the cold fire-place.

"I moved about the room as gently as possible, and tried to avoid awakening him; but while I was endeavoring to kindle a fire, he suddenly started up, his countenance inflamed with passion, and his deep-set eyes glaring like those of a tiger.

"'I'll never be taken alive,' he shouted, throwing his huge form upon mine, and crushing me to the ground with his weight, while his hand sought my throat which was compressed in his grasp until my eyes started nearly from their sockets.

"In his half-awakened madness I should have been strangled, had it not been for my dog, that flew at his leg, and inflicted a savage bite that caused Darnley to relinquish his hold and turn upon the brute; but by the time that he had staggered to his feet, he awakened to his situation, and became calm and penitent, and asked my pardon a dozen times for his mistake. I forgave him, but resolved to keep at a respectful distance the next time he slept.

"I gave him a hearty breakfast, and when he got ready to leave placed a pair of sheep-skin shoes upon his feet; but all my arguments did not induce him to accept of the garments that belonged to me, as he feared that in case he was taken they would be traced and involve me in trouble. It was considerate in him certainly, but from that day to this he has baffled all attempts at capture; but how much longer he will be permitted to go at large is only known to God."

"And did he ever pay you another visit at the hut?" I asked, as Smith paused.

"Quite frequently; but he always came alone, and would not allow one of the gang whom he gathered about him to molest my flocks. I saw him on my last trip to the mines, and he tried to bribe me to purchase him a pair of revolvers; but I refused, and he left me without a word of reproach."

It was nearly four o'clock when Smith finished his account of the oushranger; and as the heat was not so oppressive as at noon, we decided to travel eight or ten miles farther that evening, before we camped for the night.

The oxen were found, driven towards the cart, and yoked; and, with many a sharp crack of the stockman's whip, we crossed the stream, and once more pursued our way towards Ballarat.

CHAPTER III.

Travelling in Australia. — An Adventure with Snakes. — Carrying the Mails.

During the rainy season in Australia, the roads leading to the mines are almost impassable, as the soil is light and the water easily penetrates to a great depth. Teams, with half a dozen yoke of cattle, can scarcely draw a heavy cart, as the brutes sink to their knees in mud at every

step, and the wheels of the vehicle are buried to the axletree most of the time. Five or ten miles per day is as great a distance as animals can travel; and even at that rate it is quite common for the oxen to give out, and be left by the roadside, a prey for dogs and other wild animals.

The natives of the island, — for the race bears no resemblance to that class of people to whom we are wont to ascribe an elastic step, a noble bearing, and undaunted courage — have been known to follow a team for twenty-four hours, expressly for the purpose of picking the bones of an ox which they imagined would soon give out; and when the poor brute is left to die, they crowd upon him like vultures, and hack off huge strips of quivering flesh before his breath has departed.

In the summer season, when no rain falls to lay the dust or irrigate the earth, the streams, which, during the winter, are like mountain torrents, and sweep every thing opposed to them towards the ocean, become puny little rivulets, and as the summer advances, disappear altogether from sight, and nothing but deep gulches mark the spot where but a few months before a large body of water flowed.

Then the roads become hard and dry, and the light earth, pulverized by the numerous wheels which are continually passing over it, is taken up by the hot winds and whirled along the vast plains, obscuring the sight as effectually as though there was a deep eclipse. The eyes and nostrils of the traveller become irritated by the fine particles, and the dust is sifted into his ears and mouth. The latter gets coated with dust, and all moisture is denied the palate. Vainly the tongue is rolled from side to side to check the burning thirst, until at last the member gets so swollen that it becomes incapable of motion, and then, unless relief is soon afforded, death ensues. Water, slimy, stagnant water, is drank with as much eagerness as a glass of iced Cochituate in summer.

The various sink holes with which the prairies abound are drained of their contents, and if the traveller is unacquainted with a miner's life, he does not wait until the liquid is strained and boiled, and thus relieved of many of its bad properties, but swallows a large quantity of the nauseous filth, and for many days after repents of his folly. He that drinks at a sink hole, and suffers long and repeated attacks of fever and ague, or dysentery, in consequence, learns to avoid it in future.

As Fred and myself were old miners, and had tramped over a large portion of California, and knew the dangers of such indulgence, we were not likely to be caught; although we had a good guide with us in the person of the convict, who really appeared to take an interest in our welfare, and gave us much friendly advice.

The sun did not set for three hours after we started, on the afternoon that we crossed the gulch; and while we found the heat growing less oppressive, we certainly did not feel much refreshed by its disappearance, as our legs, unaccustomed for many days to long walks, began to grow stiff, while blisters formed upon our feet and galled us extremely.

We would have given a small sum to have been enabled to halt for the night; but pride prevented us from asking Smith to do so. We were fearful that he would laugh at us, and we had our reputation as Americans at heart too much to let him think that we were failing even on the first day from Melbourne. But as mile after mile of ground was got over, we could keep silent no longer.

"How much farther do you intend going before camping for the night?" I asked of the convict in a careless sort of way, although I could hardly prevent limping.

"Feel tired?" he inquired, with a grin.

"O, no," I answered, with an indifferent air.

"Well, as you are not tired, and night is the best time to travel, suppose we keep on until daylight?"

"I'll be —— if I do," broke in Fred. "I've got a great blister now, on my great toe, bigger than a silver dollar, and my boot seems inclined to raise others. I'll tell you what it is, Smith, for the last two months we've been on shipboard, and not walked five miles during that time, and if you think we can compete with you as a pedestrian, you are mistaken."

Fred jerked out his words as though each step he took cost him an immense amount of pain, and I've no doubt it did. The convict laughed silently, and relieved his feelings by cracking his long whip, bringing the end of the lash to bear with great precision upon the flanks of the leading yoke of cattle, which testified their appreciation of his attention by kicking at the heads of those following; and as such playful amusement was calculated to inspire vitality in the animals, they started off with renewed speed, and Fred and myself, with many groans, limped after.

"I can't stand this," cried my companion, after a few minutes' brisk walk. "My feet are raw, and getting worse every moment. I'll try an experiment."

He sat down in the middle of the road, and while the team rolled on, jerked off his boots and stockings, and declared, as we hastened to overtake Smith, that he felt he could walk all night, and that hereafter he would go barefooted.

"Well," cried Smith, as we reached the team, "how do you feel now?"

"Fresh as a daisy," returned Fred, clapping his boots together as though they were a pair of cymbals.

"What have you got in your hands?" asked Smith; for, it being already dark, it was hard to distinguish objects at a short distance.

"My boots," cried Fred, triumphantly.

"Are you barefooted?" asked the convict in surprise.

"Yes."

"Then if you value your life, put on your boots again, and keep them on as long as you are in the mines. You are liable at any moment to step upon a poisonous snake; and if bitten, no power on earth can save you. The natives pretend to cure bites, but I have some doubts on the subject."

Smith spoke seriously, and as there might be much truth in what he said, Fred willingly complied, although he groaned with pain as he drew on his boots, and once more hobbled along beside the team.

"About three months ago, I was freighting a party up to the mines," said Smith, "and a youngster became foot-sore. He took off his boots, although I told him there was danger of treading upon snakes in the dark. He laughed at me; but before his mirth had ceased, he uttered a yell, and sprang wildly towards the team, which I had suffered to get a little in advance.

"When he started, I suspected the cause, and groping carefully about in the dust with my whip, soon discovered a small snake, not larger in circumference than my lash, but which I readily recognized as one of the most poisonous in the country. The natives call them *capi-ni-els*, or what signifies little devils. As the impudent scamp was hissing and darting out his tongue at me, I gave him a blow on the head, ground him into powder with the heel of my boot, and then passed on to overtake the team.

"It had got some distance from me; but before I reached it, my young passenger could no longer walk, and by the time I had checked the oxen, he had swollen to twice his usual size, and was lying panting by the side of the road, incapable of moving or speaking. I got a large quantity of brandy down his throat; but it had no effect, and in twenty minutes' time he was a dead man. We buried him where he fell, and I'll show you his grave when we reach it."

"I for one shall take good care to keep my boots on," I replied, after the convict had finished his story.

"Why do they frequent a road in preference to other parts?" asked Fred, who seemed to have almost forgotten his lameness, while listening to Smith's yarn.

"Because the light dust over which we are passing retains the heat of the sun longer than the soil by the road. Snakes are fond of dragging their forms over it, as it is soft, and keeps them warm during the night. I have known teams to be stopped, and obliged to seek a route on the prairie, simply because a large number of snakes were not disposed to yield the right of way.

"The first load that I ever carried to the mines, and when I was anxious to make as much money as possible in a very short space of time, I was stopped in this same way. I was jogging along one night, all alone, and urging my oxen to their utmost speed, when all at once the leaders shied out from the road, and then stopped. I cracked my whip, and roared at them frantically, but it was of no use.

"Forward they would not budge, and at last they fairly turned, and were making very good time towards Melbourne; but I soon stopped that game, and once more got them headed the way I wanted them to go. When they arrived at the spot at which they had balked a few minutes before, they went through with the same antics, and then I thought it best to see what was the matter. Walking forward, I was saluted with a hissing sound, that greatly resembled the noise which an enraged gander emits when a stranger trespasses upon his brood.

"I paused for a moment, and tried to discover, through the darkness, what occasioned the noise, but could not, although I thought I saw something moving not far from me. I retreated, quieted my cattle, took my lantern and gun, and walked back to the spot. By the light of the candle I saw about half a bushel of snakes, coiled up in a heap, and all alive with rage at being disturbed. I hardly knew what to do. There they were, and gave no indications of leaving the road; and I no longer wondered at the reluctance of the oxen in refusing to pass over them. Had they done so, it is very probable I should have lost every one of the animals, for they could not have escaped being bitten; and then they would have died in a few hours, and I should have suffered a great pecuniary loss.

"I had a quantity of fine shot in my wagon-box, which I used for small birds. I drew the charge I had in the gun, and instead of a bullet, put in about a handful of the shot, and then setting my lantern as near the mass of snakes as I dared venture, I retreated a few paces, and taking deliberate aim, fired at them.

"The charge made dreadful havoc, and dozens of them were killed and cast out of the heap by those unharmed; but instead of causing them to escape to the prairie, they only seemed more determined to dispute the right of way, and hissed and ran out their thin, forked tongues as though defying me to do my worst. Their eyes sparkled like precious stones, and by the light of the lantern I could see them change, as they moved their position to face me, and assume a hundred different hues. It was a terrible and fascinating sight, and for a few minutes I stood and watched them twist and writhe themselves into a thousand different shapes. Seeing that I should have to make a regular business at slaughtering them, I went to work after a while, and poured volley after volley into the mass, until not more than half a dozen escaped alive.

"Even after they were dead I could not get my cattle along the road until I had first taken a shovel and thrown the bodies a considerable distance from the spot. I never saw such a large collection of serpents before, and I have often wondered why they were gathered in such a mass."

"Have you ever arrived at any conclusion?" I asked.

"I have thought that they expected an attack from some enemy of the serpent tribe, and so formed themselves into that shape for resistance."

While Smith was speaking, we heard a team behind us that appeared to be tearing along at a rapid rate; and even before we could discover its outlines, we distinguished the cracking of a whip as though the driver was anxious to see how many times he could snap it in a minute.

"I hear you," muttered Smith, driving his oxen to one side of the road, and stopping them. "There is no occasion for you to make so much noise to let people know that you are coming."

Even while Smith was grumbling, a light-bodied cart, with lamps on each side, drawn by a span of horses, and driven by a man who wore a sort of uniform, whizzed past us, and by the side of the team rode two soldiers, dressed in the livery of England. They were out of sight in a moment, but they threw a jest at us as they passed, and before Smith could reply, the soldiers were lost to view.

"A hard time you have of it," cried Smith, as he started his team again.

"Who are they?" we asked.

"That is a government team, and carries the mail between Melbourne and Ballarat. Day and night they are upon the move, and only stop long enough to change horses and escort. To-morrow at this time the miners will be in possession of their letters and papers, and I need not tell you how anxiously news is looked for from home."

"But are we to keep on day and night until we reach Ballarat?" asked Fred.

"No," replied Smith, touching up his cattle. "Do you see yonder light far ahead?" he cried, pointing with his whip.

"Yes."

"Well, at that light we'll prepare a cup of coffee, and sleep until morning. Cheer up; it's only a mile distant, and there is where you will get your first view of the natives of Australia."

CHAPTER IV.

Eating broiled Kangaroo Meat. — Australian Spears and American Rifles.

The natives of Australia are remarkable for the slight quantity of clothing which they wear, and the thinness of their limbs. Their dress consists of a dirty piece of cloth, or skin of kangaroo, tied about their waists, leaving the upper and lower parts of their bodies naked. Their color is a dingy black, although what exact shade they would represent were they washed quite clean is a matter of conjecture. A more filthy race of beings I never saw; and if we adopt the hypothetical theory of eminent medical gentlemen, that when the pores of the skin are closed, and perspiration ceases to flow, the patient dies, then the natives in Australia should, according to that reasoning, have all been under ground years ago; for I am confident that during my residence on the island, I never saw one guilty of ablution, or manifest the slightest anxiety to mingle a little water with their dirt.

With grease upon their faces, filling their long black hair, shining upon their hands, and smeared upon their bodies, they are as disgusting a race as can be found upon the globe; and after a brief survey of their huts and habits, men of a cleanly nature never desire to see them more. Their limbs bear about as great a proportion to their bodies as the stem of a pipe to the bowl; and to see them walking, is apt to suggest an idea that their legs were never intended to carry their frames. The latter part of their bodies presents a protuberance, even in the youngsters, caused by their inordinate gluttonous nature, which prompts them, when fortunate enough to have killed game, to gorge themselves to repletion, as though they never expected to eat again, and were determined to fill their stomachs even if they burst.

We soon saw a party of natives of this description seated around a fire, black with dirt, and gorged with the flesh of a kangaroo. The stockman, Smith, was busy with his team, and had declined our assistance, as he saw that we were tired and nearly exhausted with travel. Telling us to go to the fire and see how we liked the looks of the natives, we followed his advice, and walked towards them. There were ten or twelve of them huddled together in a circle, squatted upon their haunches, each with a piece of raw flesh lying upon the ground, while other junks were broiling on the coals, to be transferred from thence to the fingers of those claiming them.

They manifested no surprise or curiosity when Fred and myself halted within a few feet of them, and regarded their feeding operations with considerable disgust. Their minds appeared to be too much occupied to pay the least attention to outward objects, and as they poked their burning food among the ashes, and licked their fingers, and grunted with satisfaction, they certainly did not seem better than so many swine. At least they were not half so clean.

"Well, of all the eating I ever saw, this is the worst," cried Fred, after a few moments' contemplation.

"Even the Indians of California would be ashamed to look so dirty," I remarked.

"Hullo," cried Smith, advancing with the sauce pan filled with water, which he had obtained somewhere in the vicinity, although we could not in the dark see any evidence of a stream. "Hullo," he cried; "what is the matter? Why don't you sit down and join the gentlemen? Well, old Bulger, how are you getting along?" addressing a native that looked older than the others, and consequently more dirty.

The brute grunted, and paid no farther attention to the address; but Smith was not to be bluffed that way.

"Let me have a chance at your fire," he said, holding the sauce pan towards him; but the native gave no attention except to his burning meat, which he turned over in the ashes with a stick, and apparently had a great desire to eat raw.

"I know of a way to start him," muttered Smith. "Stand by and watch the fun," he continued, addressing Fred and myself.

He canted the sauce pan a little one side, and allowed the water to run over the rim, and strike upon the native's naked shoulder. The fellow uttered a howl as though seared with a hot iron, and scrabbling away from the fire, left the convict free access.

"There is nothing like water to start them," cried Smith, laughing, as he put his dish upon the coals, while those who still kept their places watched his motions with their little glittering eyes, as though fearful they should also be subjected to a bath.

The native whom the convict called "Bulger" lingered around the fire for a short time, as though he had not entirely relinquished all hope of again joining the circle; but when he found that Smith showed no indication of yielding his place, he grunted his displeasure, got one of his companions to rake from the ashes his lump of flesh, and placing the burning mass upon leaves, walked towards some rude huts which were built of branches of trees and leaves of the *giro*

"Good night, Bulgy," shouted Smith, as the latter toddled off; but the native paid no attention, and soon disappeared within the pile of leaves.

"You have met these poor devils before — haven't you?" I inquired of the convict.

"For the last three months they have been camped on this spot, and as water is convenient here, I generally manage to reach them in the course of the night. Besides, I make them useful in case my cattle stray away; and for a piece of tobacco not larger than my thumb they are willing to run all day."

"Bah," grunted half a dozen voices in chorus, apparently roused to animation by some word that Smith had spoken.

They extended their small hands, not larger than the paws of an orang-outang, and greatly resembling them in formation and looks.

"What do they want?" Fred asked.

"They heard me mention tobacco, and now they are begging for some. They love the needful as well as I do;" and Smith proceeded to fill his pipe, and then coolly replaced the tobacco in his pocket, much to the disappointment of the natives, who had followed his motions with anxious eyes.

"Give them a piece," I said, quick to trace disappointment in their expressionless faces.

"Not I," returned Smith. "If I want them to-morrow to run after my cattle, I shall have to give them more, for they would not recollect that I had supplied them to-night without compensation."

"Then I'll stand treat," cried Fred, handing a small piece of the needful to the nearest native, who grunted, but whether as an expression of thanks, or disappointment that it was not larger, is unknown.

The glittering eyes of the gorged natives were instantly fastened upon the fortunate possessor of the tobacco, greatly to the injury of their broiling meat. But the native upon whom the present was bestowed showed no signs of making a dividend. He carefully concealed the tobacco in a small pouch at his girdle, and after sitting a few minutes in silence, staggered to his feet, and waddled off.

"'It is get all you can and keep what you get,' with them," said Smith, as he watched the native enter his hut.

The water in the sauce pan at this moment gave indications of boiling, and as we all felt hungry, we determined to have supper before stretching our forms under the shelter of the cart. Our stock of coffee was produced, the pork and bread unpacked, and while the convict busied himself frying slices of the former, we soaked cakes of the latter in a pan of water, and sliced a few potatoes to add a relish to our meal.

At length our supper was cooked; when seated within the light of the blazing fire, we prepared to enjoy ourselves and perhaps emulate the natives in their feasts.

"How do you like your coffee?" asked Smith, as I raised my tin pot to my mouth.

Before I could reply, my attention was directed to a blaze that suddenly enveloped one of the huts, and which threatened to extend to the others. As the materials of which it was built were light and dry, but few minutes' time would be necessary to consume it; so I started up, intending to assist in extinguishing the flames.

"Let it burn," exclaimed Smith, leisurely sipping his coffee, and watching the progress of the fire; and even the natives kept their places, and appeared unmoved at the sight.

"There may be somebody in the hut," cried Fred, rising.

"Then let them get out the best way they can," answered Smith. "If these dirty scamps can't assist a comrade, I don't see why we should bother our heads."

We waited to hear no more, but rushed towards the flames; and

our steps were quickened by hearing what we thought was the cry of a child.

We seized the dry branches, of which the hut was built, and tore them from their fastenings, scattering the leaves that formed the roof, and, regardless of the heat, continued to work; the flames were too powerful for us, and we were obliged to beat a retreat.

We were about to return to our supper, when we heard a shrill cry issue from the hut — not a loud, prolonged sound, such as a man would utter when in agony, but a sharp, short yell, like the wail of an infant.

"Smith," I shouted, turning to the convict, who was still eating his supper, "there is a child burning to death."

"The deuce!" he cried, springing to his feet, and rushing quickly in the direction of the fire. "Let us save the young 'un at any rate."

Upon the ground in front of the hut were half a dozen long, sharp-pointed spears, belonging to the natives, and almost their only weapons for defence or attack. We seized those, and charging on the fire as though it was an enemy, we poked away branch after branch, until we had made an entrance sufficiently large to admit one of us, when Smith, reckless of the heat, rushed forward and entered the hut.

We waited anxiously for his reappearance, and when he did emerge from the smoke and flames, instead of carrying a child in his arms, he was dragging the inanimate form of the native whom Fred had made happy with a present of tobacco a short time before.

The native was apparently insensible; but as Smith dragged him along the ground, and let his body drop when beyond reach of the fire, he uttered a groan, as though half disposed to remonstrate against being saved.

"Well, of all the lazy scamps that I ever saw, he is the worst," cried Smith, wiping his brow with his hand, and looking towards us for a confirmation of his words.

"At least you have the gratification of knowing that you have saved his life," cried Fred, almost inclined to laugh at the rueful look of the convict.

"His life?" repeated Smith; "why, if I had let him roast he would have been much more gratified than he will be when he awakes. He is going through with a fit of digestion now, and is as torpid as a toad in winter. Ah, you brute, eat until you can't move another time, will you?"

The convict hit the native a kick with his foot, and then went to finish his supper, grumbling as he did so at being disturbed.

The natives, who had retained their positions around the fire in spite of the burning hut, and danger of their comrade, uttered a low grunt when they saw Smith drag the brute from the flames; but whether that expression was intended for satisfaction or regret, I was too little acquainted with the customs of the tribe to tell. They took no further notice of either their torpid companion or our party, until suddenly an idea appeared to enter the head of one, smarter looking than his fellows. He got with difficulty upon his feet, leaving his burning meat upon the coals, and waddling towards the insensible native, knelt beside him.

"Look!" cried Fred, suspending the operation of eating supper to call attention to the fact. "Look, and never say that the natives are destitute of feeling again."

Fred intended to be particularly severe upon Smith; but that worthy merely glanced in the direction indicated, and, after a brief shrug of his shoulders, took himself to his meal with renewed energy.

"You are convinced, I suppose?" Fred asked.

"Convinced that the lazy scamp recollects where the tobacco was put, and is determined to rob the over-fed brute of his treasure."

We found that the convict was right, for the native, after fumbling at the insensible man's girdle for a moment, reappeared at the fire, and something like a grin of triumph lighted up his greasy features, as he exposed to the admiring gaze the piece of tobacco which Fred had given away.

Tired with our day's journey, and feeling sleepy after our meal, we soon returned to the shelter of the cart for a night's rest; but before we went, we were careful enough to pack up all of our cooking apparatus, and also to place our rifles close at hand, although Smith told us that the precaution was useless, as the natives never waged warfare upon full stomachs.

It was long past daylight, when the hearty voice of the convict roused us from a deep sleep, where dreams of home and comforts of civilization were much pleasanter things to contemplate, than the half-naked bodies of ten natives, who were lying upon the ground, circling the cold ashes, where the night before a fire blazed. They lay like black snakes gorged with carrion—lifeless and torpid, and nothing but repeated doses of water upon their naked backs would rouse them.

"Go and take a bath," cried Smith, as we sat upright and rubbed our eyes, and yawned sleepily.

He pointed to a small stream of water, ten or fifteen rods distant, and as we thought it would be likely to relax our muscles, and relieve us of a portion of the soreness which we felt, we took his advice, and upon returning from our aquatic excursion, found coffee boiling, and salt pork hissing in the spider, and potatoes roasting in the ashes.

After a hearty breakfast, we were ready to think about starting; but the cattle had strayed to a considerable distance, and the convict determined not to run after them, when he had aids so near at hand, who could be induced for a trifle to undertake the job.

"Hullo!" he shouted, giving the nearest native a nudge with his foot; but the fellow only grunted, and went off to sleep again.

Smith in a rage seized a pail of water that was near at hand, and dashed part of its contents over the head and shoulders of the sleeping native, who, not being accustomed to shower baths, started up with a cold shiver, and hurriedly wiped the water from his face.

"Run and collect the cattle," cried Smith, who appeared to have forgotten that not a word of English was understood by the native.

But a series of telegraphic signals was carried on by the convict, that at last gave the barbarian to know what was wanted, and the sight of half a hand of tobacco sharpened his faculties wonderfully.

He picked up his spear that was lying near at hand, and with the end pricked into life half a dozen of his torpid companions; and although

blood flowed where the sharp-pointed wood touched, yet they bestirred themselves very slowly, and did not appear to think that their brother had used them any ways cruelly.

A short series of guttural grunts — for no other term will apply to express the sound of their language — was carried on for a moment, and then off started three of the natives to find the cattle of the convict, which were, perhaps, half a dozen miles down the stream, attracted by the sweetness of the grass which grew on the river's banks.

"As we shall have to wait some time, let's have a little amusement," cried Smith, who appeared to take the straying of his cattle in the most philosophical manner.

"Agreed!" we cried. "What shall it be?"

"I'll make the natives show us a specimen of their skill with the spear," the convict said, in the true style of Englishmen, who generally think that all creation was created expressly for their service.

"Are they expert?" I asked.

"You shall see;" and forthwith Smith commenced another series of telegraphing, and an admirable imitation of throwing the spear was not forgotten, although, to tell the truth, even the natives did not disdain to grin slightly at the clumsy gestures of the stockman.

They comprehended him, however, and pinning a small piece of paper upon a huge tree, whose trunk had served many times as a fireplace for parties of emigrants, like ourselves, bound to the mines, and by that means had nearly destroyed the vitality of the noble cedar, the native who had received the shower bath motioned to one of the youngsters of the tribe to try his hand at the target.

He selected his spear, and retired from the tree about two rods; and then, for the first time, did he appear to rouse himself, and wear the air of a human being. His eyes, which were dull a few minutes before, now lighted up, and imparted an animation to his face that I had not believed possible; there was an activity and grace in his position, as he faced the target, that proved there were some traits in their character which would have made them formidable enemies.

The youngster balanced his body, throwing his right leg back as a brace, and advancing his left foot, holding his spear upon an angle with his eye, and drawing it back and forth, as though testing the strength of his little, skinny arm, until he had apparently got the right balance, when, with a quick motion, he hurled it at the mark; and as the spear sped through the air, it produced a humming sound, like the noise of a stone when thrown from a sling by the vigorous arm of a strong man.

So quick was the motion, and rapid the movement of the spear, that the eye could not follow its flight; but we could hear the dull sound that it produced within two inches of the mark, which was not larger than a man's two hands.

"Well done," shouted Fred and myself in a breath; but the natives manifested no applause, and even Smith shook his head and muttered, —

"He can do better than that; but the youngster is nervous and hardly awake. Come, old boy," turning to the older native, "try your hand at the business, and let's see what you can do."

After the usual telegraphing, he was made to understand what was

wanted; and taking a spear a trifle heavier than the one before used, retreated nearly ten paces farther from the mark, and without apparently using the same precautions for accuracy, let it fly.

It struck the piece of paper nearly in the centre, and penetrated the tree four or five inches, quivered for a moment, but before it had ceased, the native had snatched up another spear and hurled it after the first. The second struck within an inch of its companion, and the united strength of Fred and myself was necessary to draw them from the tree.

"Now let them see what Americans can do with rifles," cried the convict, as he saw that the natives were rather jubilant over the feat of their companion.

Neither Fred nor myself were what was called crack shots, either with revolver or rifle; but we were fair, and had no need to feel ashamed of our shooting. Determined to let the natives witness a specimen of our skill, we pinned a piece of white rag, not larger than the palm of my hand, upon the tree, discharged our rifles and carefully reloaded them to be sure that they were not foul, and then retreated until we could just see the rag.

The natives watched our proceedings in silence, but with considerable curiosity, squatting upon the ground, and looking first at the target and then at ourselves with an expression which seemed to say, "if you hit that rag you are smarter than we think you are."

Indeed, so important did they consider the occasion, that they dragged from the huts half a dozen women, and as many naked children, to witness the exhibition.

I was to fire first; and as I drew a bead upon the mark, I carefully calculated the distance, and with such accuracy that the bullet cut the end of the mark, and carried a portion of the rag far into the body of the tree.

"Hurrah for the rifles," shouted Smith, waving his hat, after he had pointed out to the natives what had been done.

The crowd which had clustered around the tree stepped back as Fred took his station. He was not so long sighting as myself, but his bullet struck about an inch above my own, and nearly in the centre of the mark.

"Better and better," cried Smith, in tones of surprise; and when we joined him, we saw by his actions that we had risen in his estimation, while the natives, still squatting on their haunches, looked as though we were gods, or beings of a superior order.

"Here come the oxen," cried Smith, after a few words of congratulation. "We must get over thirty miles of ground before twelve o'clock to-night."

"We are willing," we said.

"And the lameness and blisters?" he asked.

"The lameness is nearly gone, and the blisters are broken."

"Good; help me yoke the cattle, and before to-night you will taste, for the first time, broiled kangaroo; and I'll tell you beforehand it's no mean dish. Ge-long, ye brutes," and with hard cracks of the whip the cart rumbled on, and we left the natives still squatting upon the ground, and looking after us, as though wondering why we would travel when it was so pleasant to sit still.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOLITARY STOCKMAN. — SHOOTING A KANGAROO.

ABOUT ten o'clock on the morning that we took our leave of the natives, after witnessing their extraordinary skill at spear-hurling, the sun shone out with a brilliancy and power that caused the cattle to protrude their tongues, and lift their feet as though they were shod with fifty-sixes.

At twelve o'clock, when it seemed impossible for the oxen to go much further without drink, our eyes were gladdened by the sight of green trees and shrubs, which grew as if marked by a straight line, far off on the prairie. The convict pointed to the well known signs of water, with an encouraging smile, if, indeed, a smile could be seen when a man's face is plastered over an inch thick with dust; but at any rate we were willing to consider it as an expression of joy; although, perhaps, some people might have thought our countenances resembled those of fiends rather than human beings, for no flesh was visible, and the eyes looked any thing but inviting, inflamed as they were by heat and dust.

"There is water close at hand?" I gasped, as the convict pointed to the dark green line.

"Yes; and plenty of it," he replied, snapping his long whip, and encouraging his tired animals with a hoarse shout.

The brutes appeared to sniff water even in the hot air, for they bent their sturdy necks to the yoke with renewed energy, and plodded along at a rate that required all of our exertions to keep beside the team.

In an hour's time we were standing upon the banks of a stream that had forced its way through the level prairie, and which, during the rainy season was unfordable; but now, when the hot sun had drank up most of its water, a child could have passed over and not wet its knees.

It required the united exertions of all three of us to prevent the oxen from rushing down the banks of the rivulet, and quenching their thirst before the formality of unyoking had been gone through with. The stock-whip was often raised, and its long lash exercised with terrible severity, and every time it touched the flanks of the brutes, a small piece of skin not larger than a sixpence was clipped from their quivering flanks, leaving the flesh exposed to the mercy of the numerous insects which hovered in the air and darted upon the defenceless spots with the greediness of starvation.

"It's a shame," cried Fred, indignantly, "to torture poor animals that way."

"Would you have them plunge down the banks of the stream, overturn the cart, spoil my cargo of goods, and perhaps lose two or three animals by strangulation?" demanded the convict, with the first symptoms of irritation that we had witnessed during our journey.

"No, I would not certainly desire to witness any thing of the kind; but I still think that it is a harsh way of treating animals," cried Fred, dogmatically.

"I used to think so, and perhaps am of the same opinion still; but I have too much confided to my charge to suffer loss for the want of a few applications of the whip. After you have been in the country a few years, you will not feel so tenderly for the sufferings of others."

"God grant that I may never be insensible to others' woes," cried Fred, with a genuine burst of feeling.

"Spoken like a man," exclaimed the convict, enthusiastically. "Here," he continued, extending his hand, "is a palm soiled by the commission of crime; but I have lived long enough to repent of the errors of which I have been guilty, and at times think of a mother's prayers when I was a boy. Your words have recalled the days when I used to sit upon her knee and listen to her words, and promise that when I grew old I'd imitate the virtues of my father, and be a comfort to her in her declining years. If my hand," he said, looking at it, "is soiled, my heart is not, and I offer it to you as a pledge of friendship."

"And if your hand were stained I would accept it," returned Fred, shaking his palm warmly. "I look upon you in the light of a friend, and the folly of other days weighs not the weight of a feather towards warping my judgment in considering your good and bad qualities."

The two men shook hands, and looked into each other's eyes as though they had just found out one another's worth; and when the convict had squeezed Fred's palm, he bestowed the same favor upon myself.

"Come," cried the convict, who appeared to be inspired with new life, "let us get a bit of dinner, and then I will take you to the old cattle station, where I once lived a solitary life, and where I harbored Black Darnley."

"Is it far from here?" I asked, casting an anxious glance towards the shadow of a tree, and thinking how pleasantly I could pass away a portion of the afternoon by sleeping.

"Scarce a quarter of a mile, and I'll warrant that you will feel amply repaid, tempting as the shadow of yonder tree looks," Smith said, having guessed my weakness for repose.

"Then I will go," I replied.

"I will show you after we pass the bend of the stream," the convict continued while on his hands and knees trying to ignite a fire with prairie chips, "a flock of sheep that are counted by thousands. They stretch over the land for miles in extent; even the owner does not know how many he possesses, and has never visited his stockman, but trusts all to an agent. Of course the latter has full authority to act as he pleases, and sometimes, by some mysterious process, the agent gets richer than the owner, and often buys his property, although where the money comes from, I leave you to guess."

"Then an agent's station is better than an owner's," laughed Fred.

"It would not be if all men were honest," replied the convict, with a gloomy brow; and from that time until the coffee was boiled, he did not speak another word, but appeared to be meditating profoundly upon some difficult problem.

The cattle had quenched their thirst, and were lying beneath the shadows of tall trees, lazily cropping the rank grasses within their reach. Fred and myself had bathed and felt refreshed, and as soon as dinner

was over, we announced to the convict our readiness to accompany him upon his visit to the stockman's house, where he had spent so many days of solitude.

"Take your rifles," Smith said, when he saw that we were about to depart without them.

We looked at him inquiringly.

"We are now in regions where escaped convicts range freely; and ten miles from here, by following the windings of this stream, is a forest of gigantic trees and dark recesses, where the police of Melbourne dare not venture. In that dreary retreat bushrangers find homes — stealing forth as they do during the night, to feast upon slaughtered sheep, and rob travellers; they lead an anxious life, as they never know who is about to betray them, and give them up to the merciless rigor of the authorities of the city, or else shoot them down as thoughtlessly as you would a kangaroo, in case one should cross your path."

"I would like to know if we are to carry our rifles for the purpose of guarding against bushrangers or to kill kangaroos?" I asked.

"Perhaps for both intentions," replied Smith, glancing up and down the stream, as though he was not certain that one animal or the other might not be in sight. "We might meet a bushranger, and if we were without arms he could do his will, and we should be powerless. As for kangaroos, I've killed many on the very spot where we now stand; so let me warn you to keep your eyes open, for they are like lightning in their movements, and it requires a quick eye and steady hand to cover them with a rifle when once they commence their leaps."

"A dollar to a shilling that I hit one the first fire, if not more than thirty rods distant," cried Fred, glancing along his rifle as though one was already in sight.

"I accept the wager," replied the convict, with a laugh at some thought that appeared to strike him at the moment; but without enlightening us he strode along the bank of the stream, leading the way towards the bend of the brook, which was a few rods distant, and concealed a portion of the prairie from view.

As we turned the elbow, or bend of the stream, a small hut met our view, situated near the banks of the brook; while, covering the vast plain were herds of sheep and lambs, so numerous that they seemed like grains of sand upon the shore, and I should as soon have thought of counting the latter, as the former.

The animals raised their heads and looked at us with alarm as we came in sight, and then, appearing to think that we were there for no good purpose, they started off into a run, tumbling over each other in their flight, until they had placed a proper distance between us, when they once more crowded into one dense mass, and then again scrutinized us suspiciously.

"I will show you that I have not forgotten my old trade," Smith said, after we had expressed our wonder at the number of animals before us.

He placed his hand to his mouth as he spoke, and uttered a shrill whistle, which could have been heard for a mile or two. Twice did he repeat the signal, and as he finished, the animals came slowly towards us, as though confident that one who could produce sounds like those, was incapable of injuring them.

"Ah!" laughed the convict, "how many times have I called my flock in that manner! and although years have passed since I was a stockman, I have not yet forgotten the trick of the trade."

"Your signals appear to have awakened some one," Fred said, pointing to a man who emerged from the hut, gun in hand, and who seemed undecided whether to treat us as friends or foes.

"I will tell you a few circumstances connected with that man's history," the convict said, as we walked towards him. "Ten years since he was on trial for the murder of his wife. The evidence was not very clear, so the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter, thinking that they might as well convict on that ground as to let him escape. He was sentenced to transportation for life; but after he had been in the colony three years, new facts were brought to light which made his innocence apparent. His counsel petitioned government for a release; but the ministers turned a deaf ear to all entreaties, and said that as a jury had presumed upon his guilt, they would not think of requesting her majesty to grant a pardon; and the only thing they would attempt, would be to send orders to treat the poor fellow as leniently as possible. In consequence, he was allowed a parole, and entered the service of the man who owns the vast flock of sheep which you see before you. He has grown morose since he has led a solitary life, and if he answers questions at all, it is in monosyllables. But do not treat him as if you knew for what he was transported."

The latter part of Smith's remarks were spoken hurriedly, and in a low tone, for we were close to the unfortunate man when they were uttered, and he feared to be overheard.

I looked at the stockman with singular interest as we approached him. He was, apparently, about fifty years of age, thin and slightly inclined to stoop. His face was strongly marked and peculiar, and at one time he must have passed for an exceedingly good-looking man.

His hair, which was quite white, gave him a venerable appearance; while a long, flowing beard of jet black, combed, and carefully trimmed, reminded me of a distinguished minister that I had once listened to, and whose sermon made an impression upon my mind that has never been effaced.

The stockman retained his defensive attitude, until he recognized the features of Smith, when his gun was rested against the side of the hut, and he once more dropped his head upon his breast, and with folded arms awaited our coming.

"Well!" cried Smith, with assured cheerfulness; "how do you get along nowadays?"

The stockman raised his head, and looked at the questioner as though referring him to his face, with its wrinkles and lines of care, for an answer. A moment after, his head was bowed upon his breast again, and he appeared unconscious that we were present.

"Have you seen Darnley's band lately?" Smith inquired.

"Yes," replied the stockman, still retaining his position.

"Has he visited you within the past few days?" queried Smith.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Ah, his supply of provisions was short," cried Smith, as his eyes sought the flocks as though wondering how many sheep satisfied the bushranger and his gang.

The stockman returned no answer, so we passed him and entered his hut. There were two bedsteads made of hides, a table, two rough chairs, that looked as though introduced during the days of Sir Francis Drake, a few pans hanging against the wall, an old chest with a broken lid and no lock, and these were all the articles of luxury or convenience that graced the cabin of the stockman.

Smith pointed out the spot where Darnley had slept on the night of his visit; and after we had gratified our curiosity, we left the room, and bidding the stockman good-by, started on our return to the team.

The poor man did not reply to our salutation, and after we left the house a number of rods behind, we turned and saw that he was still buried in profound reflection, and that his head was, as usual, resting on his breast.

"Poor fellow!" I muttered; "his unjust sentence has broken his heart."

"He feels the wrong keenly," Smith said. "He has but one wish on earth now; and that is, to see his daughter before he dies."

"He then has children living?" Fred asked.

"Only one, and she was a mere child when he left home. After his misfortunes the girl was placed with a respectable family in Lincolnshire. He has often heard from her — she married a hard-working man, and now has one or two children. The stockman has saved every shilling of his earnings for the last few years, for the purpose of paying their passage to this country, where he thinks the husband can prosper, and where he will have the privilege of seeing his grandchildren grow up around him. Ten months since a hundred pounds were sent for the object he had in view, but during the whole of that time no word has arrived that the money reached its destination."

"A hard case, and one deserving of our warmest sympathy," cried Fred, once more stopping to look at the solitary man, who still stood with folded arms and bowed head, meditating upon his wrongs.

"A kangaroo! a kangaroo!" cried the convict, suddenly, pointing with his hand towards a tall, slim animal, that was standing under a tree, as if to shelter itself from the sun.

We looked at the kangaroo with considerable interest. It was nearly six feet high, when standing upon its hind legs, of a dark red color, with small spots of white upon its breast, while two short arms, or flippers, were dangling from its fore-shoulders, which were narrow and lean, as though, clipper-like, it was intended for speed.

The animal watched our movements narrowly; but as the distance was too great for a rifle shot, we slowly edged towards it with the expectation of getting within range.

Cautiously we crept along the prairie, sometimes partly concealed by tall, rank grass and sweet-scented shrubs, until we were forty rods from the tree under which the kangaroo was sporting.

"Hist!" said Smith, holding up his hand, to command our attention. "The poor brute is a female, and has her young 'uns sporting around her."

A closer scrutiny revealed the presence of two kangaroos, who were playing about their mother, unconscious of all danger. They were of a much lighter color than the old one, and the fur upon their bellies was

nearly pure white. For some time we watched them, and then, desirous of obtaining fresh meat for supper, Fred and myself crawled a little nearer.

"Remember our wager," the convict cried, as we moved along on our hands and knees.

Fred nodded in reply, but after we had got a few rods from Smith, the latter suddenly started to his feet and uttered a loud yell.

So rapidly that our eyes could hardly follow their movements, did the young animals run towards their parent and disappear from view; but we had no time to wonder at that, for the mother, after a hasty glance around, and comprehending the danger in which she stood, suddenly sprang from beneath the shelter of the tree, and with the most extraordinary bounds, some of which would measure over thirty feet in a straight line, and nearly ten feet high, was passing us like a streak of lightning, when Fred raised his rifle and fired.

The kangaroo continued her bounds without relaxing her speed; when, thinking that I might be more successful, I also fired.

I heard the convict laugh heartily at our failures; but before his merriment ceased, another gun was discharged, and with a mighty bound the poor brute sprang into the air, alighted on the ground, and, rolling over and over as though even in her death struggle she sought to escape, yielded up her life.

We looked towards the stockman to see if he had discharged his gun. He was leaning on his old musket, and a bright blue smoke was curling over his head. For a moment he seemed to be warmed into life by the excitement of the sport, but before the kangaroo had breathed her last, his head sank upon his breast again, and he appeared no longer to take an interest in the affairs of life.

We hastened to the animal, and wondered at her immense muscular power. Her legs appeared like springs of steel, while a powerful tail, long and bony, was also used to help the animal make those tremendous bounds, which have become proverbial in Australia, and have excited the attention of the most eminent naturalists.

"But where have the young 'uns disappeared?" I asked, after we had sufficiently admired the animal.

"You would hardly think that they are still about her person," Smith said.

We laughed incredulously, but Smith maintained his gravity and persisted in his statement.

"It is an easy matter to settle," said Fred. "Just prove to us the truth of your statement, and we shall be as knowing as yourself."

The convict bent over the body and inserted his hand in a small opening in the belly of the animal that resembled the mouth of a pouch, but which had escaped our attention. He drew forth, as the result of his investigation, a little, struggling kangaroo, that tried to induce Smith to relinquish his grasp by snapping at his hand with its toothless mouth.

While we were admiring the softness of its skin, the second one was dragged to light; but it uttered shrill cries of terror, and endeavored to effect its escape from the rough hands that held it.

"It is as bad as murder, killing the poor brute," cried Fred, indignantly, he having recovered from the mortification of missing the animal.

"And there are no judges upon earth to sentence its murderer," cried a solemn voice.

We looked and found that the stockman had left the shadow of his hut, and was occupied the same way as ourselves, gazing at the carcass of the kangaroo.

"Man is merciless, and God punishes us all in his own good time," the stockman continued, as he listened to the grief of the motherless animals.

"Then why did you take her life?" demanded Fred.

"A man that is wronged seeks to shift his burden so that the load which weighs him down may grow lighter."

The old man, without another expression of sorrow, turned away and walked towards his hut again; while Smith, who was used to such scenes, and therefore had hardened his heart, deliberately commenced skinning the dead brute, and allowed the young ones to escape wherever they chose to run.

That night we supped upon the meat of the kangaroo; and while feasting there was little thought of the sorrow which we experienced at its death.

CHAPTER VI.

Adventure with a Dog. — The Murder in the Ravine. — Story of an outraged Woman.

The flickering light of a fire, around which was seated three men with sunburnt faces and long beard, hardly illuminated the bank of the river sufficiently to distinguish objects ten yards distant. The men were Smith the convict, Fred, and myself. Each of our mouths were graced with dingy pipes, and while we puffed away diligently, our eyes were fixed upon the cheerful blaze, silently watching the ever-changing embers, and meditating upon the events of the day. The wind had gone to sleep with the sun, and the heated air had given place to a coolness that felt doubly refreshing after the scorching which we had undergone on the prairie that forenoon.

The air was still perfumed with the smoke of broiled kangaroo meat, attracting large numbers of a fox-like species of animals, that rarely ventured from the surrounding darkness, into the light of our camp-fire, but skulked in the vicinity, and waited for the time when sleep would overpower us, and allow them free pillage of our larder. Occasionally an impatient one would utter a short bark, as though expressive of his disgust at our watchfulness, and after he had thus given vent to his feelings, slink away into darkness again; but their fiery, eager eyes, could be distinguished as they prowled around and jostled each other while taking counsel.

It was near ten o'clock. We had lapsed into silence, and each one was busy with his own thoughts, perhaps laying plans for the future

From the time that our pipes were lighted not a word had been exchanged, and I was just about knocking the ashes from mine, and proposing a retirement to our blankets beneath the nearest tree, when the prolonged howling of a dog attracted my attention.

I looked towards Smith for an explanation, but found that he was as much puzzled as myself, and was holding his pipe in one hand, while his head was bent in the direction of the sound, as though waiting for a repetition before he ventured to express an opinion.

Again did the mournful sound ring across the prairie, and this time it seemed nearer than when first heard. I thought I knew the bay, and could have sworn that the animal was a staghound, and a full-blooded brute at that. I had seen none of the breed since I had arrived in Australia, and I thought it singular to find one at such a distance from Melbourne.

"What is that hound baying for at this time of night?" I asked of the convict, who still remained speechless.

"Are you sure that it is a hound?" Smith inquired.

"Quite positive. There he goes again. The brute has treed some animal, and is informing his master of its whereabouts," I replied, listening to see in what direction the sound proceeded from.

"You are wrong there," cried Fred. "The dog is evidently coming this way, and perhaps has started a kangaroo. If it comes within sight I'll try it, even if I miss as I did this afternoon."

Fred laid his hand upon his rifle which was lying by his side, and tried to peer into the darkness, but a moment's experiment convinced him of the folly of his thought, and he laid the gun down again.

"I've never heard a sound like that since I left old England," the convict said, as the baying continued, and grew nearer at each repetition.

We all three felt an anxiety that we tried to conceal from each other. The loneliness of our location, and the uncertainty of meeting with friends in that part of the country, the frequent robberies that had of late been committed, and the daring of the bushrangers, were all ample cause for vigilance on our part; and perhaps we suspected that the dog was used by some gang to discover the presence of travellers, and expedite the work of pillage.

Nearer and nearer did the hound approach, and we had just time to snatch our rifles from the ground, and start to our feet, when the animal sprang into our narrow circle, and with subdued bays seemed to claim our notice.

"Give him a wide berth," shouted the convict, swinging his sharp axe over his head as though in readiness to bring it down upon the skull of the dog if he showed signs of hostility. "Keep clear of the brute," he continued, "for he may be mad."

The hound, a noble animal, with long, wiry limbs, and heavy jaws, around which drops of foam were hanging, instead of shrinking from the uplifted arm of the convict, seemed to measure the danger in which he stood at a glance, and before we could interfere, or the heavy axe descend, sprang full at the throat of Smith, and such was the impetuosity and suddenness of the attack that the convict was borne to the ground, and for a moment was at the mercy of the dog.

Fred and myself raised our rifles simultaneously, but before we brought them to bear, the animal had quit his grip and began erauneh-ing some bones whieh were lying near the fire, tearing the meat whieh adhered to them in the most ravenous manner, and exhibiting all the signs of starvation.

"Don't fire," shouted Smith, struggling to his feet. "Don't fire; you see the poor brute is nearly starved."

We still held our rifles ready, however, and were half inclined to use them; but, as we looked at the dog, and saw how greedily he was devouring his food, we concluded to wait and see what he would do after he had satisfied his appetite.

"The dog is rather quiek and spiteful," cried Smith, rubbing his throat and adjusting his shirt collar, whieh had been somewhat disarranged. "It served me right for threatening him, when it's evident that he has sought us peaeeably."

The conviet, instead of harboring maliee, eut large pieces of flesh from the body of the kangaroo and fed him. He greedily devoured all that was offered, and wagged his long, rat-like tail in satisfaetion. When, however, he had nearly demolished one fore-quarter of our prize, he walked a short distanee from the fire and renewed his howling, commencing on a low key, and gradually aseending, until the yells could have been heard for miles.

"What is the matter with the brute?" asked Smith, turning to Fred and myself, who were too perplexed to answer the inquiry; and, before we could speak again, the hound walked slowly baek to the fire, looked piteously into our faees, and, strolling out into the darkness, commeneed baying as loud as ever.

Three several times did the intelligent animal seek to induce us to follow him, without our comprehending his meaning; but when it was evident that such was his desire, grave questions arose as to the expedieney of our doing so. We thought that possibly it was a trick to induee us to leave our baggage so that the owners of the dog would have an unrestrieted opportunity to plunder the cart. Such things had happened before, and why not again?

We glanced suspieiously at the hound as he stood near the fire, looking at our faees and appearing to understand every word that was said on the subjeet; indeed, when Smith stated, during the eonversation, that he would not on any account leave his wagon, the brute uttered a howl as though he despaired of suecess, and turned all of his attention to Fred and myself.

"Let us follow him," cried my friend, grasping his rifle as though he feared nothing with that in his hand.

The dog, as soon as Fred had uttered the words, erouehed at his feet and lieked his shoes, while a low bark testified to his joy.

I looked towards Smith for advice and guidanee in the matter. He was musing on the subjeet, but when he saw that we only waited for his deeision, he shouldered his axe, and nodded his head.

"Let us follow the brute," he eried. "We may be the means of saving life, and, perhaps, much suffering. Lead the way, good dog, and take us to your master."

The hound sprang from his erouehing position at Fred's feet, and

started on a dog-trot along the road that led towards Melbourne. In a few minutes, despite our exertions to keep pace with him, he was out of sight; but we followed along the course which he had started, and after a short time he returned to our sides, wagging his tail, and apparently urging us to increase our speed.

A dozen times did he disappear in like manner, yet never for any length of period; and after we had walked nearly three miles, the animal abandoned the beaten track and continued across the prairie.

"I don't want to go a great ways in this direction," muttered the convict, glancing around, and trying to pierce the darkness.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because, a few miles farther and we shall be near the forest which I spoke to you about. It is infested with men better seen at a distance or not at all."

In spite of Smith's fears, however, we tramped on quarter of an hour longer, and then, by the uneasy movements of the dog, concluded that we were not far from our destination.

Suddenly the animal sprang forward with a bay of warning, and disappeared as if by magic. The next moment we were upon the steep bank of a gulch, nearly thirty feet deep; and had not the actions of the dog rendered us careful, we should have plunged headlong upon its rocky bed.

For a moment we remained motionless, hardly daring to move, for fear that one false step would lead us to our ruin; but, after listening for a while, we heard the dog as he reached the bottom of the ravine, and then we determined to follow at all hazards.

With careful steps we worked our way down the steep bank, and after half an hour's toil found ourselves at the bottom. The hound was waiting for us, and testified his impatience by a deep bay. The instant, however, that we joined him, he became silent, and trotted on as before.

Suddenly a groan, but a few feet from us, caused us to halt, and hastily look around. But a short distance from us were the indistinct outlines of a cart, and near the vehicle was the hound, busily occupied in lapping something that was lying upon the ground.

Another groan, and we moved towards the individual that seemed in such deep distress. By the bright starlight, but which hardly penetrated the gulch, we saw the form of a woman extended upon the rough rocks, while near her lay the body of a man motionless.

"Here is work for us," cried Smith, all his genuine feeling returning; and he threw his heavy axe aside, and in a twinkling had the woman's head upon his knee, and was pouring down her throat a potion from a black bottle which he carried in his pocket.

"Look to the man," he cried, assuming the leadership at once; and in obedience to orders I knelt beside him, and placed my hand upon his heart. He was cold, and his heart was motionless. As I withdrew my hand, I felt that my fingers were moist and sticky. I tried to discover what adhered to them, but the darkness was too great.

"Give me the matches, Smith," I said, quickly. "We will strike a light, and investigate this affair."

A large quantity of drift wood was lying on the bed of the gulch,

and well dried by the hot summer's sun. I cut a few shavings, and a bright fire was soon under headway, and cast its ruddy glare upon the group collected around the cart, which was broken in half a dozen different places, and had, apparently, been thrown from the banks above.

As soon as sufficient fuel was added, we turned our attention to the woman whose head Smith was holding. Her eyes were closed, and her teeth clinched like those of a person in a fit. There was not a vestige of any color in her face, while her garments appeared as though they had experienced rough usage, and were torn in a dozen different places. In spite of the strong decoction which Smith had poured down her throat, she did not revive, or appear to comprehend what was said to her; and after rubbing her hands for a while, and finding that it did no good, I devoted a few moments to an examination of the body of the man.

I now comprehended the meaning of the sticky substance which adhered to my hand, for upon his breast were two large, ragged wounds, either of which was sufficient to let out the life of a man, and from each had oozed his blood until it had congealed in large lumps, and was held, bag-like, by his thick flannel shirt.

"There has been murder committed here," I cried, holding up my hands, stained with the vital fluid of the dead man.

"There has been more than murder," replied Fred, in a low tone. "There has been violence offered to a woman."

"Impossible," I cried, with a shudder at the thought.

"Look and convince yourself, then," Fred said, seizing a burning brand and holding it so that the light was thrown upon the face and body of the insensible woman.

Upon her neck was a large, discolored spot, and a near examination revealed the impression of finger-nails, as though she had been seized with no gentle hand, and choked, until forced to yield compliance to unholy wishes and desires.

Upon both sides of a neck that retained traces of beauty, although bearing the impression of the sun's burning rays, were the dark marks to be seen; and the hand that had left its impression was none of the smallest, nor its grip the weakest, as we could readily see.

The hound had crouched close to us, and watched with wary eyes our movements. Often did he rise and lick the face of the insensible woman, and after uttering a howl of grief, retire to his resting place, to mourn in secret for his loss.

"Force more of the liquor down her throat," cried Fred, who was rubbing a hand that appeared accustomed to toil, for its palm was hard and broad.

Smith once more brought his bottle into requisition, and forcing apart the teeth, emptied a portion of its contents into her mouth. Whether the chafing began to have its effect, or the liquor was uncommonly strong, is a matter of doubt; but at any rate she strangled as though she would never recover her breath, and ended by opening a pair of very frightened blue eyes.

She raised her head from Smith's knee, glanced hurriedly and with frightened looks first at Fred and then at myself, and before we were aware of her intentions, sprang to her feet, and with loud shrieks

sought to escape. Before she had taken half a dozen steps, however, Smith's stout arms were thrown around her, and he was calling to her in gentle words to listen to reason, and to look upon him as a friend — that he would protect her, and help avenge her injuries.

Part of his words were lost during the momentary struggle which occurred between them; but when her strength failed, and she sank exhausted and panting into his arms, for the first time she appeared to comprehend that we were not bushrangers, but human beings and friends.

"Compose yourself," cried Smith, as gently as though he held an infant in his arms. "See, even your dog is satisfied that we mean no harm; he led us to this place, or you would have perished before morning. Tell us what has happened, and how we can assist you."

"Where is my husband?" she asked, after a moment's silence, during which her wild eyes wandered from face to face, as though seeking to verify the truth of his words.

We returned no answer, and she repeated the question, though in a louder tone, and appeared to doubt us because we kept silent.

"My husband! where is my husband?" she shrieked; and as she turned her restless eyes towards the cart, she suddenly appeared to comprehend every thing.

"He is dead — he is dead," she cried, starting to her feet, in spite of the gentle restraint which Smith sought to impose upon her.

She saw the body of the man who had been murdered, and with a loud cry she fell upon it, laid her head upon its cold bosom, and sobbed as though her heart would break. We did not interrupt her grief, but the faithful dog lay down beside her, and added his subdued howls to her tears; and when she mourned the loudest, he would lick her hands and face, and seek to comfort her with his love.

We heaped up fuel on the fire, and waited patiently for the time when the woman would exhaust her grief, and give us some account of the proceedings by which she and hers had suffered.

While Smith and Fred remained near the fire, they examined the cart to see if it contained any thing that would be useful to the unfortunate woman in her present hour of grief. There were a few culinary utensils, besides a thin mattress and blankets — all thrown in promiscuously, as though the load had been ransacked and rifled of every thing that was valuable, and the remainder not considered worth taking away.

The night wore on, and light would soon herald the approach of day. It was necessary that we should return to our camp, and look after our effects; for who could tell how long they would be safe unless guarded by a display of rifles? Besides, the cattle needed looking after, and collecting, or they would be likely to stray back towards Melbourne and get mixed with the wild animals which belonged to some of the numerous stockmen on the road. Or the bushrangers might take a fancy for a change of diet, and prefer beef to mutton; and in this case they would not be likely to ask the permission of the owner of the animals, unless he was stronger-handed than the robbers.

I saw Smith glance uneasily along the ravine, and edge towards the woman as though he wished to cheer her in her affliction, and yet explain

about the large amount of property which he had left unprotected. As her sobs had somewhat subsided, worn out by the violence of her emotions, she appeared more calm; he made the attempt, and kneeling beside her spoke, —

"We are strangers," he said, taking her sunburnt hand between his rough palms, and looking at her as tenderly as though she had been his sister; "we are strangers, but there is not a man present but will shed his blood in your defence; and while we have strength there is no fear of your suffering. Have confidence in us, and explain how this dreadful affair happened."

He waited patiently for an answer, but some few minutes passed before she could repress her sobs, which commenced anew at the sound of his voice. At length she raised her head, brushed back the heavy masses of hair which partly screened her face, and with an uncertain voice replied, —

"I thank you for your offers of assistance, and accept them; for what can I do alone in this desert without friends? My troubles are so unexpected that if I do not appear grateful, attribute it to a want of realization of the dreadful scenes through which I have passed since yesterday. My husband — "

She threw herself upon his corpse again, and for a while her grief recommenced with all its former violence. Smith soothed and comforted her, and gradually was enabled to draw all the facts connected with the murder from her unwilling lips.

"It is ten days since we arrived at Melbourne," she went on to say; "my husband thought that we had better leave our two children at the city with some friends, who were passengers in the same ship with ourselves, until he had settled upon what occupation he should pursue. He had a strong desire to try his luck at the mines, and as we had a little money left after reaching this country, he invested it in buying a cart and horse, and a few articles which were needed on the route. I was very reluctant to part with my children, but I now perceive that it was for the best; for it is probable that the little dears would have shared the fate of their father, had they travelled with us. The chief object of our visit to this country, however, was not so much a desire for wealth, as the thought of meeting a parent whom I have been separated from since I was a child."

She paused for a moment, and buried her face in her hands, as though reluctant to proceed. Smith and I exchanged glances of surprise, while the woman continued her rambling story.

"I am almost ashamed to say that my father was transported to Australia for life; but he was innocent of the charge against him, and it has since been made manifest; but government refuse to give him his liberty, and he is still a convict."

"What was the charge upon which he was convicted?" asked Smith, with breathless anxiety.

The woman hung her head and remained silent; and Smith was obliged to repeat his question before he obtained an answer. His pertinacity seemed cruel, but he had an object in view.

"He was charged with the death of my mother," she answered, her voice stifled with tears.

"And your name before you were married was —"

"Mary Ogleton."

"It is the same," muttered Smith; but instead of revealing the good news to her, he waited to hear the balance of her history since leaving Melbourne. A few soothing words, and she continued, —

"Ten months since we had letters from my father, strongly urging us to come to him, as he thought my husband would make a better living here than in England. We were the more inclined to follow his advice, as the letters contained drafts for money to help us pay our passage, which we otherwise should not have been enabled to have done."

"Tell us about your journey since leaving the city," cried Smith, "for we already know your history before that period."

She looked surprised, and continued, —

"Father wrote us that he was tending a flock of sheep on the road leading to Ballarat, and that he could not leave his station even for a day; but we were to write him if we intended coming, and he would have a friend on the lookout for us. We answered his letter, saying that we should embark on board of the first ship that sailed for Australia; but when we reached port we found none to welcome us; and it was only after diligent inquiries that we learned where he was located. Yesterday, about noon, we thought that we must be near his home; and on inquiring of a man that we met, he said that he knew him well, and would conduct us to his hut. By his advice, we left the road which we had travelled for four days, and struck across the prairie. I did not like the appearance of our guide, and expressed my fears to my husband; but he laughed at me, and placed implicit confidence in all that the stranger said."

"What sort of looking man was your guide?" asked Smith.

"A dark-featured man, with long black beard, tall, and strongly framed. Upon his forehead was a large scar, that looked as though recently inflicted. I noticed him particularly, because I mistrusted him the instant he offered to act as our guide."

"It was Black Darnley," cried Smith, in reply to my interrogation; "the villain — he shall yet suffer for his treachery."

"That was the name by which his companions addressed him," cried the woman, who overheard Smith's remark.

The convict encouraged her to continue her narrative, and motioned Fred and myself to remain silent.

"He led us to the bank of this ravine, and said that we must here abandon our team, and walk a few miles to father's hut. My husband refused to follow his advice in that respect, and while Darnley was urging him to do so, our dog, which had faithfully remained with us since we left England, started in pursuit of a strange animal that bounded along the prairie faster than the hound could run. We all became interested in the chase, and when we lost sight of dog and animal, I looked up and found five rough men close beside me. I started with surprise; but before my husband could say a word, or use the gun which he carried, Darnley discharged a pistol full at his breast, and he fell dead. I remember nothing more, or, if I do, I pray to God that I may soon forget it, or else join my husband in heaven. Were I childless, I would dash my head against these rough stones, and so end my days."

As she finished her story, she bowed her head upon her husband's cold bosom, and her tears flowed fast and freely, while her frame shook as though she was laboring under an attack of ague.

"Listen to me," said Smith, at length, laying his hand upon her arm to attract her attention: "we have a long journey before us, and time is precious; but we will lose a day for the purpose of restoring you to your father. Trust me, I know him, and if you think you can walk a few miles, a few hours from now will see you in his arms."

"I am strong now," she said, rising, as though the news had given her new life.

"Then lean on me, and I will assist you up this bank. Courage — remember you live for your children and parent now."

As Smith offered his strong arm, she accepted it; but a sudden thought took possession of her mind, and she quitted his side and once more threw herself upon the body of her husband.

"I cannot leave him," she shrieked, clasping her arms around his neck, and pressing her head upon his bosom. "He has been my only friend for years; he did not despise me when he knew that my parent was a convict; he has loved me, and is the father of my children. Let me remain with him, and die upon his breast."

"This is madness," Fred cried, impatiently.

"Hush," said Smith. "Consider what the poor thing has suffered, and treat her gently as a sister."

The stout convict, whose heart had been strongly touched by her story and deep love, raised her in his arms, soothed her, spoke words of comfort to her, and promised if she would but leave the spot, that the body of her husband should soon follow her, and be buried in a Christian-like manner.

She listened like one who did not comprehend his meaning, and all the time that he was talking, her eyes were fixed upon the pale face of her husband, as though she expected each moment to hear his voice, and see him start to his feet, and open his arms for her protection.

With gentle force we urged her away from the distressing sight, and when, after long labor, we had gained the bank of the ravine, we found that the poor woman was nearly unconscious, and hardly capable of moving.

"Where now?" I asked of Smith, as we carried her along.

"To the hut of Ogleton," he cried; "and then, if I mistake not, we shall have work before us."

"What kind of work?" asked Fred, who was carrying the rifles, and the sharp axe of the convict.

"The work of revenge," cried Smith, solemnly.

"I am ready for it," exclaimed Fred, brandishing his rifle; "God only grant us all strength to perform it."

And as we staggered along the prairie with our burden, the dark clouds in the east broke away, and revealed the glowing tints of the rising sun; and a hundred bright-plumed birds darted through the air, awakening the solitude of that vast plain with their shrill calls, and each cry seemed to say, "Revenge! revenge!"

CHAPTER VII.

Black Darnley's Villany. — The Convict Stockman.

A brighter sun never shone upon the barren plains and fertile valleys of Australia, than that which appeared above the horizon on the morning after the murder and deed of violence committed by Black Darnley and his gang of bushrangers. Our party had not closed their eyes in sleep during the night, yet not one of us felt the least fatigue or desire to rest, until the woman, who was under our protection, had been placed beneath the shelter of her father's roof, humble as it was, and removed from all society and scenes of civilization.

As we supported the unhappy woman towards the habitation of the convict, and spoke words of encouragement which fell upon listless ears, we thought of a parent's love, and how strong it must exist in the heart of that old man, who had grown morose under his wrongs, yet still clung to the recollection of his child, and fancied her a girl, instead of a full-grown woman, and the mother of a family.

We had no doubt that her reception by her father would be warm; but we dreaded to know how he would deport himself upon the news of the harsh treatment which she had received being explained to him. He was represented to us by Smith as a man of quick passions — bold and fearless, or he would never have accepted the situation to which he was attached — surrounded, as he was, with dangerous neighbors — convicts, who cared no more about shedding the blood of a man than they did for the lamb which they slaughtered when hungry — wild beasts, who prowled around the fields at night, and skulked near during the day, and who, if urged by starvation, would attack the shepherds, provided they interposed between them and their prey.

This was the kind of man that was to be told that his daughter had suffered at the hands of men whom he had spoken with weekly for months, and who respected him only because they knew him to be no coward, and a convict like themselves.

Our walk across the prairie was slow and laborious. We were compelled to govern our pace with that of the woman, and as she was half-dead with grief, and insensible to our words of encouragement, we concluded to let her cry without hindrance on our part, and only hoped that our wagon might escape pillage during our long absence.

It was about nine o'clock when we reached the place where we were camped the night before. The wagon remained where we had left it; but it needed no tongue to tell that it had been visited, while we were away, and that a portion of the load was removed. Boxes of goods were overturned, and tops wrenched off, bales were cut open, and their contents scattered upon the ground; and, upon a near examination, we found that the impudent robbers had used our dishes to feast from, and that there were still smoking brands upon the fire where they had boiled their coffee, as though they knew we should be absent all night, and had plenty of time to enjoy themselves before our return.

For a few minutes, after Smith had seen the havoc which the bushrangers had made with his cargo, he seemed to need as much comforting as the unfortunate female under his charge. But he was a man, and had seen too much of the world's trials to get discouraged, so he proceeded to gather up his goods in the most philosophical manner, although an occasional oath did escape him as he missed some article of value which he knew could not be replaced except in Melbourne.

While Smith was occupied with his cargo Fred and myself proceeded to cook breakfast, a meal which we stood very much in need of, considering the labors of the night; but before we did so, our female friend was placed upon blankets and screened from the hot sun. She refused all offers of nourishment, and would not drink even a cup of strong tea which we proffered her. Coffee, we unfortunately had none, as the bushrangers had taken a fancy to the few pounds which were on the cart, and carried it with them, rejecting with seeming contempt the green leaves of China, of which there was a large box undisturbed.

Even the flesh of the kangaroo which we had hung upon the limb of a tree was saved; but our store of salt pork was gone, also the few vegetables, worth almost their weight in gold at the mines, which had been treasured until we should arrive at our destination.

Fred uttered a curse when he found that there was not a single potato left; but, after he had vented his displeasure, he applied his energies to the matter before him with all his usual determination.

Fred's clothing and my own, contained in one small canvas bag, was gone, and we stood in all that we owned. That did not distress us, however, for we were not likely to go into society where a change of dress was expected, but we did growl when we found that the scamps had carried off all our powder, excepting what our flasks contained.

"Whose work is this?" asked Fred, who was broiling a piece of kangaroo on a stick, and in a very artistic manner, for the purpose of tempting the poor woman's appetite.

Smith, to whom the question was addressed, straightened his stout form, and held up a number of flannel shirts, which he was taking to the mines on a venture. They had been cut with knives in the most wanton manner, and hardly a square inch had escaped.

"There is evidence enough of the perpetrator," replied Smith, pointing to the holes.

"Well, who is he?" cried Fred, sprinkling a little salt upon the burning flesh.

"There is but one gang of bushrangers in these parts who inflict wanton injury upon the goods of carriers. That gang is Darnley's!"

"And yet you pardoned him once when he was in your power," I said.

"True; and had I been here my cargo would have escaped molestation. He little thought that he was injuring me. I will do him the justice of saying that."

"He and his gang should be swept from the face of the earth," cried Fred, who, having cooked and seasoned the meat to his satisfaction, now approached the woman, who was lying upon a blanket, apparently unconscious of what was going on around her.

He had but uttered the words when she started to her feet, grasped his arm with a vehemence utterly at variance with her previous docility, and exclaimed, —

"You are right. Kill the monster! Kill him, for he is unfit to live. Kill him, for he has wronged an unprotected woman, and committed outrages that will condemn him to eternal punishment in the next world."

She released her grasp of Fred and fell to the ground, where she sat rocking her body to and fro, uttering moans of anguish. But she no longer shed tears, and her eyes looked wild and threatening, as though her troubles had affected her reason.

"Who talks of killing?" cried a deep voice. "That is God's prerogative, not man's nor vain woman's."

We started, and turning saw that the convict stockman had approached us unawares, and was leaning on his long gun, keenly scanning the features of the unfortunate woman.

"There are some crimes which God designs man to punish," answered Smith, desisting from his occupation of gathering up his traps. "I think that the scoundrels who robbed my team deserve hanging, and I don't want to wait until they are dead to know that they are receiving punishment in the next world."

"The world to come is one of darkness to us mortals, and who can pierce its blackness. But God has promised light, and behold the angel of the Lord will reveal all things, for so sayeth the Book of all books."

"I don't know what you mean," replied Smith, who had listened attentively to the wild, rambling speech of the convict without comprehending its import; "but this I do know, that I would mash the heads of the bushrangers who robbed my cart, if they were within the reach of my axe."

"Trust in God for vengeance, for to him does it belong," exclaimed the convict, drawing a dirty looking and well-thumbed Testament from his pocket, and turning over leaf after leaf as though seeking for a particular chapter.

"We must get him to put up his book, or he'll read from now till sundown," cried Smith, with visible alarm at the idea of being compelled to listen.

"Here is an unfortunate woman that needs your assistance," said Smith, laying a hand upon the old man's arm, and calling his attention to his child.

"Does she need spiritual assistance, or only food for the body? Her looks are like those of a person who has been suffering."

"She has suffered much within twenty-four hours, and her only friend now is that dog that keeps so close to her."

"Let her be comforted," the convict cried, approaching her; "if her sorrow is ever so deep, it can be healed."

He closed his book as he spoke and approached his child, who sat with downcast eyes, and apparently unconscious of his presence.

"Daughter," he began; but at the sound of his voice so near, she raised her eyes hastily, and on her face could be seen the emotions and struggles to recollect where she had before heard his tones. She

pressed her hand to her forehead as though forcing memory to reveal its secret, but suddenly the truth was revealed to her.

"Father," she cried, starting to her feet, and throwing her arms around that white-headed man's neck, venerable before his time. "Father! O God, is it you?"

She laid her aching head upon his bosom, and, with her arms around his neck, shed tears as freely as she did the day that she was separated from him, as she thought, forever.

The convict staggered back, and would have fallen, had not Fred's strong arm supported him. He glanced from face to face as though trying to read the meaning of the surprise, and then he turned his looks upon his daughter.

"Mary," he cried, after pushing the hair from her forehead, "can it, indeed, be my child — has the little girl whom I left in England grown to be a woman!"

He held her close in his embrace as though he feared that something would happen to prevent his seeing her again. He kissed the tears from her cheeks, and begged her to be calm, and to tell him about her voyage, and lastly to speak about her husband and children.

Her sobs were her only response. He grew impatient at her refusal to answer his interrogations, and then suspicions of foul play entered his imagination.

"There has been some wrong done you," he cried, appealing to his daughter.

She answered with tears and moans.

"Speak, and tell me who has dared to injure you," he cried vehemently. "Was it your husband?"

His brow grew threatening and black, as he put the question.

There was no reply, but his daughter clung to his neck with a more convulsive grasp, as though she feared to lose her parent also.

He glanced from Smith to Fred, and from the latter to myself, as though debating whether we were the guilty party.

"Tell me," he cried, lifting her head from his shoulder, and seeking to get a glimpse of her face, "who has wronged you?"

There was no response. He placed her gently upon the blankets, and then with a face that was livid with rage, grasped his musket which had fallen to the ground.

"Which of you has dared to do this?" he asked, and the ominous click of the lock of the gun proved that he was in earnest, and that all of his worst passions were aroused.

No one answered. I looked towards Smith, expecting to hear him explain every thing; but, to my surprise, he was silent; evidently too much astonished at the unexpected turn which the affair had assumed, to speak.

My look was misconstrued by the indignant convict, for before I could speak, the long gun was levelled at the breast of Smith, and in another moment all his hopes and fears would have been at an end, had not his child started up and rushed towards him.

"Not him!" she shouted, wildly. "O God, not him!"

He dropped the muzzle of his gun, but his fierce eyes still glared from Fred to me.

"Which of these two?"

He indicated us with a motion of the hand that held the gun, and looked in his child's face for confirmation.

"Neither, father — so help me Heaven, neither. Without the aid of these friends I should have perished."

He dropped the muzzle of the gun, and each of us felt thankful as he did so, for we had witnessed the accuracy of his aim the day before, and while the muzzle of the musket was pointed towards us, one of our lives was not worth insuring.

"You are tired and distressed," the convict said, addressing his daughter with a degree of tenderness that I thought wonderful after his late outbreak.

"My head," she murmured, "feels as though it would burst; while my heart is broken already."

"Rest a while, until I confer with your new-found friends, and then you shall accompany me to my home. It is a hut, but it is all I have to shelter you."

It was singular to witness how soon the recluse had once more become an active man of the world, and for a while forgotten his Bible and religious fanaticism.

"Tell me all that has happened," the convict said, motioning for us three to follow him a short distance from his daughter, so that our conversation could not be overheard by her.

Smith related the strange visit of the hound, and his leading us to the scene of the murder — our finding his child in an insensible condition — the story of her wrongs, and our surprise at finding that she was in search of him. He listened with clinched teeth, and only interrupted the narrative with groans of rage and anguish. When he knew all, we waited to see what course he would pursue.

To our surprise, he did not speak, but turned away as though about to seek his home.

"Stay one moment," cried Smith, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"Well," cried the convict, impatiently.

"What do you propose to do?" we asked.

"Are you Americans, and ask that question?" he demanded.

"You think of seeking Black Darnley?" Smith continued.

"I do."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"You shall not," cried Smith, with sudden energy. "You are no match for him and his gang."

"My daughter's injury must be avenged. I go alone to consummate it."

"Stay until to-morrow, and we will accompany you," Fred and myself cried with one accord.

The convict hesitated for a moment, then suddenly extended his hands, and while he wrung ours, promised a compliance. The next instant he had lifted his daughter in his arms, and was walking with the burden towards his hut.

We saw no more of him until towards night, and then he was in front of the hut cleaning his long, heavy musket.

CHAPTER VIII.

An Expedition. — A Fight with Bushrangers. — Death of Black Darnley.

"I don't like the expedition," said Smith, pettishly, as he saw Fred and myself examining our powder-flasks and counting bullets.

"Then stay here and await our return," cried Fred, bluntly, looking up from his work.

Smith moved uneasily, muttered something in an under tone, felt the edge of his constant companion, a heavy axe, and then replied, —

"If you two harum-scarum youngsters are determined to get your throats cut, I don't see but that I shall have to be near at hand. But I tell you it is bad business, and none but crazy men would think of penetrating that dark forest in search of bushrangers."

"You wouldn't let that old man go alone, would you?" we asked.

"No; but then ——"

He stopped a moment, as though to collect his thoughts, and pettishly exclaimed, —

"D—— it, you are going in search of the worst gang on the island. Black Darnley is equal to all three of us in a personal encounter."

"But suppose we kept him at bay, and tried the effect of rifle shot?" I asked, holding up a short, heavy instrument, carrying about twenty-five to a pound.

"The rifle looks like a true one, and I know that you boys can shoot, but suppose that you didn't get the chance?"

"Then we must trust to luck," answered Fred, coolly.

"I'm no great hand at bush-fighting," replied Smith; "but we have joined our fortunes for a trip to the mines, and I'm not the man to desert you at the time of need."

"Then you'll go?" we asked.

"Yes; if I get killed it matters not much."

In half an hour we were ready; each man carried a small knapsack, containing a few cakes of bread and the remains of the kangaroo, while Smith provided himself with a small bottle, the contents of which he kept a profound secret.

Not knowing whether we should ever be fortunate enough to return and claim the few articles of property that belonged to us, Fred and myself paused for a moment to bid them farewell.

Standing in the doorway of the stockman's hut, we saw the form of his injured daughter watching us on our tramp. She remained motionless until we turned to continue our march, and then she waved a blood-red handkerchief as though bidding us remember her injuries and avenge them.

Right before us, at a distance of five miles, was a dark line of trees, extending for many leagues along the horizon. In the depths of that forest few white men had ever penetrated. Once, a dozen of the police of Melbourne attempted to break up a gang of bushrangers who

sheltered themselves upon the edge of this wild region. On the alarm being given, the villains discharged a volley at the officers and then fled. Five of the police were killed or wounded, but the remainder, nothing daunted, started in pursuit. They got separated amidst the thickets, and but one man returned alive to Melbourne. The remainder either got lost and starved to death, or else were killed by the bush-rangers. After that, government was content to offer large rewards for the apprehension of the escaped convicts, but the police did not care to venture a second time into their dread abode.

I have mentioned these circumstances to show that the undertaking upon which we had embarked was one of no ordinary kind; that there was much peril and little honor to be gained in an encounter with half a dozen desperate men, who knew that their lives depended upon the stout resistance which they should offer, and of course would fight to the death.

If we did look sharply to the loading of our rifles, and felt the long bowie knives that we carried at our waist to find whether the blades worked easily in their sheaths, it was because we expected to use them, and knew that our only hope to return alive was by a prompt employment of the deadly weapons when an encounter took place.

It was near nine o'clock when we halted upon the outskirts of the dark forest. Hardly a ray of the hot sun penetrated the woods; all was gloomy and silent. Occasionally a parrot upon the borders of the forest uttered a shrill scream, and then spreading its gaudy wings sought shelter upon the bough of a tall tree, from whence it could watch our movements without danger.

The hound, which we had taken with us, ran with his nose close to the ground, sometimes moving within a few feet of the trees, and then starting off, scouring the prairie in his search, but always returning, until he suddenly stopped before what seemed a dense thicket. During all the time that he had been upon the scent not a cry had escaped him; indeed, he seemed to realize that silence was our only safety, and acted accordingly.

"The dog has found the trail of the bushrangers," the convict said, suddenly halting, and waiting for the rest of us to join him.

"The dog is keen on the scent, and acts as though trained to track runaways," cried Smith, resting his heavy axe upon the ground, and rubbing his shoulder where the skin was nearly worn off by friction.

The animal bounded towards us, wagged his tail, looked into our faces with his knowing eyes, and then trotted slowly back to the thicket before which he had halted in the first place.

"Don't let us stand here all day under this broiling sun," cried Fred, impatiently. "If we are to search for bushrangers, let's begin and get through with the job as soon as possible."

"There is no haste," cried the aged convict, in a tone of reproach. "Our success depends upon the degree of caution that we employ. Our object is to surprise the party we are in pursuit of, and not let them surprise us."

"O, I understand," replied Fred, indifferently; "something of the Indian style of warfare, hey? Well, we are somewhat used to that, and can follow a trail as well as any amateur hunters in the country."

The convict made no reply, but examined the priming of his gun, tightened the sash which he wore around his waist, and then, briefly surveying the little party, as though calculating on the relative strength of each man, he moved forward.

We gained the thicket, where the dog was awaiting us. No entrance through the dense undergrowth met our view; and had we not known that the dog came from a breed of hounds that never deceive, we should have deemed it impossible for human beings to have entered the forest in that direction.

For some time we examined the premises to find an opening; but none appearing, Smith swung his axe over his head and let its sharp edge strike the bushes, intending to cut a passage. As if by magic the boughs gave way, and we discovered an opening which bore the appearance of having been frequently used.

A brief examination convinced us of the fact. The branches of young trees and the tops of the bushes were so interlaced that no one would have suspected that an entrance into the forest was possible in that quarter. It proved to us that we were near the encampment of bushrangers, but whether the party we were in pursuit of, was more than we could tell.

We motioned to the hound to lead the way, and the noble animal, after a brief examination of the ground, trotted slowly forward.

Our steps were taken with caution, for we wished to come upon the outlaws unexpectedly.

For ten minutes we continued our silent march, the dog leading the way with unwavering instinct, avoiding the thickets and dense growth of trees, — hardly noticing the small wild animals of the hare species that ran before his very nose, — until he suddenly stopped and looked into our faces, as much as to say, "Now, pray be cautious."

"Hist!" cried the convict, who led the way, holding up his finger. "I smell smoke."

"And I can see it," replied Fred, pointing to an opening in the trees nearly a quarter of a mile distant.

We all strained our eyes in the direction that Fred indicated, and I no longer doubted that we were in the vicinity of an encampment, although neither Smith nor the convict was ready to testify that they saw signs of fire.

"I call my eyes as clear and keen as most any one's," Smith said; "but if you can see smoke it's more than I can do."

"My eyes are not so good as they were twenty years back, and I trust more to the scent than the sight. Now I can smell smoke, but see none," the aged convict said, inhaling his breath as though trying to distinguish from what direction it came.

"You Englishmen have never lived in one of our American forests, or you would be better acquainted with the appearance of smoke when it came from a fire that has long been neglected and is about dying out. I will wager a pound of good rifle powder that in yonder clearing we shall find a camp of bushrangers, and that the smoke which we see comes from the fire they made when they returned from their nocturnal excursion last night."

"You may be right," the convict said, in a musing tone. "If we

are," he continued, "in close proximity to those we seek, what do you advise?"

"I would advise a seperation of forces — let Jack and myself approach the encampment in one direction, while you and Smith can steal towards it from another. There are many reasons why we should act in this manner, and you do not need my advice to be convinced of its force."

"May the God of battles aid us," muttered the convict, *sotto voce*, as though fearful we should catch his words and fears. "I see," he continued, "the force of your reasoning. When you are ready for the attack, discharge your rifles, and mind and not waste a single shot."

The convict stalked off as he ceased speaking, following the lead of the dog. We were about to start in a different direction, but still verging towards the smoke, when we were detained by a few words from Smith.

"Remember, boys," he hurriedly whispered, "that if any thing occurs, you are to take charge of my property and remit the sale of it to my mother. She is somewhere in London, I believe. Take care of yourselves, and remember that it was not I that proposed this confounded excursion."

He squeezed our hands as he spoke, and the next minute we lost sight of his burly form as he followed in the wake of the convict.

Still keeping the smoke in view, Fred and myself struck off in another direction. We carefully picked our way through the forest, hardly making noise enough to alarm the numerous birds that were perched upon the trees, in the deep shade, to avoid the heat of the sun. Not a dry stick was trodden upon to send forth its crackling sound — not a bough was brushed past rudely for fear its waving top should give an alarm. Silently we stole along, and were, as we thought, near the camp. We crept upon our hands and knees until we came in sight of an open space, and then upon the first glance we knew that we were close to a gang of bushrangers.

In the middle of the clearing was a low hut, covered with the hides of bullocks, which were nailed on shingle fashion, for the purpose of excluding rain. The logs did not fit very snugly together on the sides of the cabin, and grass was crowded into the chinks, although in some places it had been pushed out as for the purpose of enabling those within to take a survey of the different approaches to the hut. A fire was smoking before the door, looking as though it had been kindled many hours before and allowed to die out for want of fuel.

The only other sign of life was a grass hammock, which swung from the branch of a tree, not more than four feet from the ground, and which appeared to contain some person who was sleeping. For ten minutes after we reached our allotted station we waited for Smith and the convict to gain a position and give the signal for an attack.

There were no signs of them, and we began to fear that they had strayed from the right path, when a small kangaroo dog walked lazily from the cabin and stood near the door, as though debating whether he should return and finish his nap or exercise in the open air. He was not long in making up his mind, for his keen scent detected something in the atmosphere that was not right; and where we were lying

we could see his sharp eyes glance suspiciously around, and saw the stiff hair upon his back rise as though getting ready to meet the danger that was near at hand.

There was suddenly a bay — a loud, angry bark, and then the hound which had belonged to the murdered man bounded into the enclosure and fastened his strong teeth into the neck of the dog, the latter hardly offering battle so sudden was the onslaught.

There was a yelp of pain as the hound shook the smaller animal in his strong jaws, and that cry raised an alarm that brought half a dozen men, with long red and black beards, and repulsive faces, to the door of the hut.

We saw their look of surprise as their eyes alighted upon the fighting dogs — we saw them glance hastily around, and raise their guns, which they carried in their hands, as though to get ready for a sudden attack; and while we were in a state of uncertainty, and almost ready to commence the fight, a tall, powerful-built man, with heavy beard and long hair, rolled from the hammock in which he had been swinging, and rushed towards the yelping brutes.

"Whose dog is that?" he shouted, "and why do you stand there like a pack of fools, allowing them to make noise enough to wake the whole forest? We shall have the beaks upon us if this continues;" and as he spoke, he raised the branch of a tree which was lying near the fire, and lifting it as easily as a common man would a walking stick, he struck at the hound, who still held the kangaroo dog by the throat, and growled at his slightest movement as though he feared that one of the parties concerned in his master's murder would escape.

I held my breath while the huge club was suspended in the air, wielded, I knew full well, by the strong arms of Black Darnley. Twice I raised my rifle to my shoulder; and thought to interpose against what I considered certain death to the brute, but a fear that Smith and the convict were not at their stations prevented me.

I almost shouted a warning to the dog as the club descended, but my fears were vain; for the animal sprang aside, and the stick fell heavily upon the sharp-nosed dog of the bushrangers. He gave one yell, and was crushed into a shapeless mass.

The ruffian uttered an oath of rage; but before he could renew the attack the hound flew full at him, and fastened his long fangs into Darnley's throat. The latter staggered back, surprised at the sudden attack, but only for an instant. His stout hands were quickly raised, and then his grasp encompassed the dog's throat so tightly that his eyes nearly started from their sockets, and he was glad to unclinch his teeth, and gasp for breath.

Full at arm's length did Darnley hold the animal, and we could see a grim smile steal over his face as he thought of the pain he was inflicting. The gang started forward to assist the ruffian, but with an oath he bade them keep back and let him alone. I feared the dog's life was short, and determined to save it, but I was anticipated.

I heard the sharp crack of Fred's rifle close by my side, and following the direction of his aim, I saw Darnley loosen his hold of the dog, stagger back, press one hand upon his side as though he felt a sudden

pain; but still he kept his feet, and waved to his gang encouragement, while his voice exclaimed, —

"The beaks are upon us, d—n 'em; show no quarter or mercy; fight till you die, or you'll all be hanged."

He staggered towards the hut as he spoke, but in trying to keep his balance, removed his hand from his side. A torrent of blood gushed forth, and dyed the ground a scarlet hue; he strove to keep upon his feet, but his strength was ebbing fast, and with a reel and lurch, like some strong ship before foundering, he fell to the ground, never to rise again.

His gang had rushed into the hut upon the first discharge, leaving their leader alone, unsupported; but as he fell, they issued forth, each armed with muskets and long pistols, and a profusion of knives.

"Fire," whispered Fred, as he hastily loaded his rifle.

I disliked the idea of shedding blood, and hesitated; but before Fred had driven his rifle ball home there was a discharge opposite to us, and another bushranger fell bleeding to the ground.

They raised a startling yell for vengeance, and rushed towards the spot where the smoke was ascending from the discharged musket. Before they had reached half way across the clearing, Fred and myself poured in our deadly fire, and two more of the escaped convicts fell mortally wounded.

They were then seized with a panic, and separating, each one seemed determined to seek safety in flight; but before they gained the shelter of the woods our revolvers were brought into requisition, and one more ravisher was made to bite the dust.

"May the God of Israel give us strength to kill them," shouted the convict, bursting through the thick bushes with his long gun in hand, and his white hair streaming over his shoulders.

"No mercy to the scoundrels," cried Smith, waving his heavy axe over his head, and advancing at a run in pursuit.

That cry came near being his last; for one of the bushrangers, seeing that he had no gun, suddenly turned in his flight, and raising his musket, presented it full at the broad breast of Smith. The latter did not falter or dodge, but rushed towards the robber with uplifted axe, uttering, as he advanced, a wild cry that startled me, it was so loud and shrill, and sounded like the last yell of a dying man in agony.

I feared to see the villain discharge his musket, for I knew that Smith was so near that he could not well be missed. I would have shot the fellow myself, but my rifle was empty; still thinking to save him, I ran hastily towards the parties; but before I had advanced ten steps I saw the bushranger's musket flash in the pan, but no report followed. His gun had missed fire.

Throwing down the weapon with an oath, the ruffian drew a long knife; but before he had an opportunity to use it the heavy axe descended upon his unprotected head, and crashing through skull and brains, it clove him to the chine.

With no groan or word he fell; and when I reached the side of Smith there was not another bushranger left to battle with. We were masters of the field, and not one of us had received a wound.

"Let us praise God for this victory," cried the aged convict, removing his apology for a hat, and casting his eyes heavenward.

"Humph," grunted Smith; "we'd better make preparations for quitting these woods, instead of praying, according to my fancy."

"To Him alone belongs the praise for this day's work — for this mighty triumph," cried the old man, whose religious feelings were all awakened by the carnage.

"I don't dispute that the Lord lent his aid, but to my mind, if it hadn't been for these two Americans, he'd deserted us in the hour of need. Two good rifle shots are a great help towards obtaining a victory," exclaimed Smith, wiping his axe of the crimson gore which still adhered to it, and glancing around the clearing, as though he expected there might be more bushrangers starting up to offer battle at any moment.

"The Almighty is powerful, and can crush at his pleasure."

"We all know that," cried Smith, impatiently, "but to my mind it's better to examine yonder hut, and then make our way back to the team as fast as possible, for there's no knowing how soon we may have a new gang to contend with."

His advice appeared so reasonable that we instantly prepared to follow it; but first we stopped by the side of Black Darnley, and examined to see whether he was dead. The rifle ball had made sure work, having passed through his left side in the direction of his heart, and made its exit below the ribs opposite. On the dark face of the dead man was a look of defiance, as though even in his death-struggle he had tried to gain his feet, and to face his enemies with his latest breath.

I removed the pistols which he wore in his belt, and as no one presented a better claim for them than Fred and myself, I divided with him; and during our long sojourn in Australia, he kept one, and I the other. He still clings to his, while I have deposited mine in the office of the American Union, as a sort of memento of times long past.

A visit to the hut was next paid, and there, heaped up in a corner, we not only found the goods which were stolen from Smith's cart, but numerous other articles; and while we were sorting them, I kicked aside some dirt, and saw a flat stone. Curiosity prompted me to move it, and underneath was a hoard of gold dust, gold coins, silver dollars, and English shillings and half crowns, the whole amounting to about two thousand pounds.

Without stopping to divide it, we gathered it up with the most convenient articles for carrying away, and then setting fire to the hut, left it blazing, knowing full well that those of the gang who escaped would return before long with reënforcements, and that our lives were not worth much if we were taken by surprise.

We gained the open prairie, and without stopping to rest, continued our march, until we reached the hut of the convict stockman. The daughter of the latter came out to us, and as she laid her hand upon her father's arm, she whispered, —

"Is he dead?"

He nodded his head, and then I saw a gleam of satisfaction cross her face, as she thought of her injuries, and the prompt manner in which they had been avenged.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STOCKMAN'S DAUGHTER. — MOUNTED POLICE OF MELBOURNE.

THE day after our return from the excursion in pursuit of bush-rangers, the cattle were yoked together, and had been attached to the cart for an hour, before the convict issued from his hut.

Twice had Smith cracked his long whip, each time crushing large green flies that had alighted on the flank of the nearest ox, and yet the lash so lightly fell that not a hair of the animal was ruffled, or a particle of pain inflicted. I never understood the science of using a whip until I learned it upon the plains of Australia, and saw stockmen, with one wave of their weapon, cut chips of hide and quivering flesh from the panting sides of frightened or contrary cattle.

As the convict advanced to meet us, Smith rose from his seat with an expression of gratitude at the prospect of soon being enabled to move.

"Well," said Smith, speaking first, "you see we are ready to start, yet we could not go without bidding you good-by."

'I have much to thank you for," he said, his eyes cast to the ground as though fearful of looking up and exposing the weakness which oozed from them, and wet his long gray beard. "My child thanks you all for the promptness with which you have revenged her wrongs; and to these two Americans she says, that her prayers shall ever ascend for your safe return to your country, and that happiness may await you when you have rejoined the friends of your childhood."

"Can we bid her farewell, at parting?" asked Fred.

"If you wish it, yes," answered the convict: "but I have prayed with her all night, and have besought the Lord to strengthen her heart under this load of affliction. She is calm now, and when you speak do not allude to her bereavement, or recall yesterday's bloody tragedy."

As he ceased speaking, he returned to the hut, and emerged leading the widow. Her looks were much changed since we had seen her the day before. Weeping and fasting, and sleepless nights, and above all, the thoughts of her husband's sudden death, had so preyed upon her spirits that she seemed like another person.

"Here are the two Americans, child, who wish to bid you farewell," her father said, when he saw that she was disposed to pay no attention to us.

Twice did he speak before she comprehended him; and after she had placed her hands to her head, as though to recall a recollection of our features, a faint look of recognition came over her face, and her leaden eyes were lighted up with some such expression as we had seen the day before, when she asked if Black Darnley was dead.

"You are sure that he is dead?" she asked in a low whisper, seizing Fred by the arm, and gazing into his blank-looking face.

"Whom do you mean?" Fred inquired, evading her question.

"You know; Black Darnley, — the wretch who killed my husband, and injured me. You look like him; but your face is not so black, and

your hair is lighter. But you may have changed it for the purpose of deceiving and wronging me again. Ah, the more I look at you the firmer am I convinced that you are the wretch."

She pushed his arm away, and turned with flashing eyes upon her parent, speaking vehemently, —

"You told me that Darnley was dead, and that my injuries were avenged; and yet you see him standing before you alive, and insulting me with infamous propositions. Have I no friend here to protect me?"

"We are all your friends," I replied, in a soothing tone.

"It is false! There is not a man here, or Black Darnley would not live to see another sun. Men, indeed? Ha, ha! my husband possesses more spirit than a dozen of you."

She folded her arms, and rocked her body to and fro, shaking her head, and muttering incoherent sentences, with her eyes fixed upon the ground intently, as though trying, amid the dirt, to discover the blood of her destroyer.

Poor Fred, who looked about as much like Black Darnley as the man in the moon, turned slightly red with mortification; and to this hour, an allusion to his wonderful likeness to the celebrated bushranger is sure to bring on a fit of the sulks that will last a day or two.

Fred retired as soon as he found that his presence irritated the unhappy woman, who, it was very evident, was slightly deranged by her accumulation of trouble.

"We are all friends here," I said, at length, "and are willing to do your bidding. See, here is your father; and do you think he would stand unmoved in the presence of a man who had wronged you. You must surely recollect my face. Look at me closely."

"Ah, I do remember you now," she cried.

"That's right," I said, encouragingly. "I thought you would know the man you had leaned upon and talked with on the night——"

Before I had a chance to finish my remarks, with a wild, mad cry, she sprang forward, and, with a movement like lightning, drew my bowie knife, which was stuck in a belt around my waist, and had not Smith intercepted the blow I should not now be writing sketches about my adventures.

In spite of his interference, however, the knife, sharp as a razor and ground to a point like a needle, fell upon my unprotected forehead and opened a gash two inches long, almost penetrating the brain. The hot blood blinded me for a moment as it gushed from the wound. I staggered back from the unexpected attack, but before the mad woman had an opportunity to repeat the blow, my faithful friend was by my side, and had wrenched the steel from her hand.

"Ha, ha!" she shrieked; "blood! — blood! — his blood flows freely, and I avenge my own wrongs. Look at him bleed! — 'twas my hand that struck him, and now he'll die like a dog. I triumph — I — I —"

She could say no more, but fell back in convulsions. Smith caught her in his strong arms, and was about to bear her into the house, when he was interrupted by what appeared like so many apparitions.

Mounted upon strong, well-trained horses, were a dozen of the mounted police of Melbourne, who, during our interview with the convict's daughter, had stolen upon us unperceived, and had formed a

circle in which we were the centre, to prevent an escape had we been so disposed. So quiet had they ridden, that it seemed as though they had sprung from the ground at the command of some genii of the lamp.

We did not form a very prepossessing group, and, at first, much less suspicious people than police officers would have imagined that something was wrong.

"Hello!" cried the man who appeared to command the squad, riding towards us; "what have we here — a wounded man and a dead woman. Whose work is this?"

"We can explain this to those having authority to ask," cried Fred, carelessly throwing his rifle across his arm; yet it was done in such a manner that the officer reined his horse back several paces, and shouted, —

"Ready with your carbines, men! — we have fallen upon a gang of bushrangers."

I heard the ominous click of the locks of the guns, and cleared the blood from my eyes to get a view of our assailants.

"We are no bushrangers," shouted Smith, starting forward and fronting the officer. "You should know my face, lieutenant," he continued, to the man in command.

"Ah, Smith, is it you?" the lieutenant said, in a sort of patronizing way, and riding forward. "Put up your guns, men; we are not among bushrangers, I think." And in obedience to his command, the men slung the carbines at their backs, and rode forward.

"What is the matter with that fellow?" the officer of police asked, pointing to me.

"He was just injured by a knife, sir, in the hands of this woman, who has lost her reason," answered Smith, in the most obsequious manner.

"Lost her reason, hey," said the lieutenant, carelessly. "Then she has no business here; or rather I should say that no persons of sense would be here if they could help it."

The mounted troop laughed, as in duty bound, and even Smith suffered his features to relax in token of appreciation of the officer's facetiousness.

"Where are you two fellows from?" inquired the lieutenant, turning towards Fred and myself abruptly.

By this time I had bound up my head with a handkerchief, and wiped some of the blood from my face. The wound had nearly ceased bleeding, thanks to some lint which I always carried about me.

"Are you talking to me?" asked Fred, in a careless tone.

"To whom else? — speak!" cried the officer, impatiently.

"Perhaps you would not know where the place is located, even if I told you its name," replied Fred, with provoking indifference.

"I am the best judge of that," answered the lieutenant, turning red in the face.

"O, you are?" Fred laughed.

Smith, who had acted in a nervous manner ever since the conversation commenced, approached and whispered in Fred's ear, —

"Speak civilly to him, or he may take you to Melbourne."

This, instead of having the desired effect on Fred, only rendered him the more impudent; for he didn't relish being called "fellow," even if he had on a flannel shirt.

"Will you tell me where you belong?" demanded the officer, angrily.

"O, certainly."

"Well, where?"

"Have you ever heard of such a place as Boston?" Fred asked.

"Yes — it is in England."

"Not the Boston that I mean," Fred exclaimed, drawing up his form to its full height. "I mean Boston near Bunker Hill."

A sudden change came over the lieutenant's face. The dark frown passed away, and a smile crossed his sunburnt countenance.

"You are Americans?" he asked, with an air of politeness.

"We claim that land as our home," Fred answered.

"I might have guessed as much, for you both carry an emblem of your country."

He pointed to our rifles and smiled. We saw that he was disposed to be rational, and therefore laid aside our reserve.

"There are but few of our people," I said, "but know how to handle these weapons; and it's rare that they venture into an unknown country without one for a companion."

"I think so; for I have met a number of Americans in Australia, and yet every one clings to his rifle. But, while we are talking, the woman is suffering. Maurice, assist to take her into the hut, and open a vein if you think it necessary."

The man addressed as Maurice gave his bridle to a companion and dismounted. The convict and the stranger raised her in their arms, and removed the unfortunate beneath the rude roof, where at least she could be screened from the sun.

"Well, Smith, what is there new in these parts?" inquired the lieutenant, carelessly. "Seen any thing of Black Darnley and his gang, lately? I understand that you have been seen conversing with him a number of times recently. Take care — I give you fair warning; if I report you, your ticket of leave is withdrawn."

"But you wouldn't do that?" cried Smith, his face showing the alarm which he felt at the threat.

"I don't know but that it will be my duty to do so before long," cried the officer, shaking his head like a petty tyrant, who wished to inspire fear.

"I have been two days on the road," he continued, "searching for his gang. If you can give me any information, Smith, that is of real value, why, perhaps——"

"But I can give information," cried Smith, who, awed by the great man's presence, appeared to have forgotton all about the death of Darnley.

"Ah! of the scamp's gang?" the officer asked, with eagerness.

"Yes."

"Where are they?" demanded the lieutenant, leading Smith one side.

"Six of them are dead — and with them, Black Darnley," cried Smith.

"You are trifling with me," said the officer, sternly.

"No — upon my word; but ask the Americans, they will tell you all."

"Is it so?" asked the policeman, turning towards us with an air entirely changed from that with which he had first addressed us.

We confirmed the report, and gave the particulars.

He listened to us with astonishment; and yet his wonder was not unmixed with admiration. I saw him try to suppress that feeling, but it would find vent, John Bull like, and with an oath he exclaimed, —

"By G——! you Americans are a wonderful people. You seek adventures with as much gusto as a knight-errant of the olden times. If I had a dozen such as you two under my charge, I'd soon free this neighborhood of bushrangers."

"There would be but one difficulty," answered Fred, with a laugh.

"And pray what is that?" asked the lieutenant.

"Why, Yankees have a great desire to lead, instead of being led."

He drew us one side, so that his men could not overhear his remarks, and said, —

"Of course you knew that a large reward was offered for the death of Darnley and his gang."

We reiterated our ignorance, and the officer looked at us in astonishment.

"Then let me give you joy — for you have completed one of the best day's work that you ever began. Give me the proof that Darnley and his gang are dead, and I will put you in the way of obtaining the reward."

"We did not sell our rifles for gold," replied Fred, "but to assist an old man to revenge his daughter's injuries. If you can serve Smith and the old convict, we will willingly forego all thoughts of a reward."

In a few words we stated the case, and put him in possession of the facts relative to our taking up arms. He listened to us patiently, and when we had finished, said, —

"If you can give convincing proof that the gang of bushrangers has been broken up, I can certainly promise you a free, unconditional pardon for Smith and the stockman. But I must first see the bodies of the dead men, and have your certificate of the gallantry of the parties named."

"How can we manage that?" we asked.

"By delaying your journey, and accompanying me to the spot."

Fred and myself consulted for a moment and agreed to do so. A day or a week was nothing to us, if Smith could be made a free man. We called to him: —

"Smith," said Fred, "do you wish a pardon from government?"

The poor fellow flushed red in the face, and then the blood receded and left his cheeks pallid as death.

"If you wish a free and unconditional pardon, you must go with us back to the haunts of Darnley," Fred said.

The tears started to his eyes with delight, and for a moment he was incapable of motion; but in another second he bounded to the side of the cattle, and with nervous fingers was unhitching the yokes and turning the brutes loose upon the wide prairies, to feed upon the rank grasses which abounded on the sides of the stream.

Throwing down the weapon with an oath, the ruffian drew a long knife; but before he had an opportunity to use it, the heavy axe descended upon his unprotected head, and crashing through skull and brains, it clove him to the chin. Page 66.

CHAPTER X.

Desperate Deeds of two Convicts. — Lieut. Murden's Story.

The sun was pouring down with Australian brilliancy and power, but we cared but little for the heat, if we could gain the scene of the battle before a gang of bushrangers reached the spot, and concealed the bodies. It was, therefore, with considerable uneasiness that we saw the lieutenant of police coolly dismount from his horse, throw the bridle to one of his men, with directions to remove the saddles from the animals, and let them drink their fill at the stream, and afterwards be allowed to graze on the rank grass.

"How is this?" I asked; "are we not to start immediately? Delays are dangerous."

"Patience, my friends," returned the officer, leading the way towards the stockman's hut. "I value your lives too much to think of asking you to undertake a jaunt of twelve or thirteen miles at noonday, when the sun is hottest."

"But we are capable of the task," replied Fred, energetically.

"I have no doubt of it, gentlemen; but if you can endure heat and privation, my men and horses cannot. Why, before we could gain the edge of yonder wood, half of the men would be sun-struck, and two-thirds of the animals would expire for the want of water. No, no, trust to me, and let us take the cool of the evening."

"But we shall reach the woods too late to make an investigation," I said.

"It is very probable," answered the officer, entering the hut, where the convict's daughter was lying on a rude bedstead, made of the skin of an ox.

"But have you no fear of an ambuscade?" exclaimed Fred, who began to entertain an opinion that the lieutenant was not well posted on the subject of bush-fighting.

"Not in the least," replied the Englishman, removing his coat and heavy sword belt, and stretching himself on a box.

"O, then you will keep skirmishers in advance of the main body, I suppose?" Fred said.

"No," answered the officer, lighting his pipe; and then, observing an expression of surprise on our faces, he continued, —

"Do you take me for such a greenhorn as to suppose that I would enter a wood after dark? No, sir; I've studied the habits and cunning of bushrangers for many years, and seen much service during that time. I shall start near dark, halt half a mile from the edge of the forest, and remain there until daylight. Does that suit your ideas of our peculiar kind of warfare?"

We could offer no objections to the plan proposed; and as we were to spend the day in idleness, looked around the hut for something to make a breakfast on. The policeman guessed our thoughts, for he called one of his men, and gave him an order.

"Get coffee and breakfast ready, Maurice," he said, "and when ready, serve it here."

The man bowed, saluted his superior, and retired with military precision.

"An old soldier," said the lieutenant, carelessly; "he has served through half a dozen campaigns in India."

"And did he never rise above the ranks?" I asked.

"Never obtained a position higher than that of corporal; but that is not extraordinary in the English army. Promotion with us goes with birth and influence, not merit and brave deeds. Maurice has distinguished himself in many a hotly-contested field; yet now, in his old age, he draws a trifling pension, and is glad to be enrolled in the police force of Melbourne, where better pay and quick promotion awaits him."

"As you have been in the country for many years, suppose that you give us a short account of your experience," cried Fred.

"Willingly; but wait until after breakfast. That woman is getting better — hear her breath, regular and natural. Let her father come in to tend her, if he wishes."

The latter remark was made to one of his privates, who stood at the door, and had prevented the entrance of the aged convict. The father entered with a humble air, and seated himself near his daughter's side.

He appeared too grateful for the privilege of thus remaining in the presence of his superior to pay any attention to his conversation; and when breakfast had been disposed of, and our pipes were lighted, each of us chose a comfortable place to rest at full length on the floor of the hut, and discuss matters and things in Australia. I found the lieutenant a rare companion, and a man that had seen much service in the country.

"We have a number of hours to spare before we undertake our expedition," said Fred, during a pause in the conversation; "suppose you favor us with a short history of some of your adventures in this country. You have seen many years' service as a police agent, and tales of no ordinary kind must be familiar to you."

"If I should tell you of the murders which the bushrangers sometimes commit, when they have a thirst for blood, you would think I was romancing," answered the officer.

We both protested against such an idea, and Lieutenant Murden — that was his name, and I am glad to see that, since I left Melbourne, he has been promoted to a captaincy — knocked the ashes from his pipe, carefully reloaded it, told the sentinel at the door to keep his eyes open, and not let a gang of robbers approach the hut unperceived, wet his lips with the contents of a flask, which he carried about his person, lighted his pipe with a match, and then began.

LIEUTENANT MURDEN'S STORY.

"Not long since, the whole police force of the country was thrown into a state of great excitement and vigilance, owing to the desperate deeds of two convicts, who seized a schooner on the coast, compelled the crew, on the pain of instant death, to navigate her to a distant part of the island, and by keeping their guns pointed at the heads of the

frightened men, and relieving each other at the task, were enabled to accomplish their ends.

"The convicts were landed, and to repay the sailors for their kindness and forbearance, they shot the two men that rowed them ashore; and, from the time that they set foot on land, until the day of their death, their course was marked with blood.

"They took the life of every human being that stood in their way. The most unreasonable request, if there was a moment's hesitation, was rewarded with a bullet; and it seemed as though demons, not men, were thirsting for the blood which was shed so profusely.

"The news of the murderers' doings was brought post haste to Melbourne, and I and my troop were ordered to start immediately for the bush, and secure them, dead or alive. Extraordinary powers were granted me by the government. I could take horses or cattle, or even press men into my service, if I thought desirable, for the purpose of capturing the bushrangers. Hardly a moment of preparation was allowed me, beyond the choice of twelve men, whom I knew I could rely upon; and even while I was conversing with the superintendent, another messenger arrived with the news of fresh butcheries, more bloody and brutal than the last.

"At eight on the evening of the day that I was ordered to take my departure, my troop was leaving Melbourne on the road leading towards Ballarat, in which direction I learned the convicts were travelling.

"At two o'clock we halted at a cattle station; and while some of our men changed saddles from our tired horses to fresh ones, the remainder cooked a kettle of coffee, and broiled a piece of beef, to stay our stomachs during our long ride. From the stockman we obtained some information, as the bushrangers had visited his cattle station two days before, selected what animals they wished, and then shot the companion of the man we were conversing with.

"At seven o'clock we again halted at a cattle station, but for ten minutes we could not find a soul to answer our questions. We searched the hut and an adjoining piece of woods, in hope of finding somebody who would give us a little information. As time was precious, however, I was on the point of borrowing what animals I wanted, when two of my men brought in a native, half dead with fear. He had been found secreted under some brush in the woods, and all our persuasions could hardly convince him that his life was not in danger.

"After an immense amount of questioning, I learned that the two murderers had visited the cattle station the day before, had shot the keeper, and would have killed the native had he not fled to the woods for protection. After the deed, they ransacked the hut thoroughly, possessed themselves of a quantity of rum which they found, renewed their supply of ammunition, mounted fresh horses, and were off in the direction of Ballarat at full gallop, according to the account of the native.

"It only remained for us to follow as fast as possible. In twelve hours we had travelled a distance of one hundred miles; and although we felt the want of rest, yet I knew that time was too precious to waste in sleep. A hasty breakfast, and we were off; but before we had rode twelve miles our attention was attracted near the roadside by seeing a flock of birds hovering in the air and uttering shrill cries. I endeav-

ored to get my horse to approach the place, but with starting eyes and every indication of terror, he refused to move.

"I dismounted, and entered the bushes, and found my suspicions confirmed. Two men were lying dead on the ground, both with bullet holes through their heads. I made a short examination, and satisfied myself that the murders were committed the day before, and that the bodies were dragged amongst the bushes, after being robbed of every thing valuable about their persons.

"Time was too precious to give Christian burial to the dead men, even if we had had the proper tools to open the earth. With a sigh, we left the birds their prey, and once more continued our journey through the wildest part of the sterile country between Melbourne and Ballarat.

"On, on, we went, urging our panting, tired beasts without mercy; and just as we thought we should have to halt, to allow the animals a resting spell, we reached the large cattle station of Witon Martells. Here we found every thing in confusion; and although usually half a dozen men were employed at the station, only two came out to greet us, and they wore frightened visages.

"We soon heard their story. The murderers had rode up to the hut about six o'clock the evening before, and wished to exchange horses. The stockmen refused; and hardly were the words from their mouths before one of the convicts drew a revolver, and fired upon those standing in front of him; and while he was thus amusing himself, his companion sat on his horse, and laughed to see those not instantly killed endeavor to get away. Three men fell under the fire, and hardly knew what caused their death, it was so sudden. One man, mortally wounded, was just dying as we rode up; and the two that came to greet us had saved their lives by taking to their heels, and entering the bush.

"They had watched the convicts pick from the herd of horses the most able and strongest nags, and then, after eating what they could find ready cooked in the hut, started for Ballarat, where, no doubt, amongst the crowd of miners, they thought they would escape detection.

"Throughout the long night we spurred onward, and when daylight appeared, tired and sore with our journey, we stopped at another station to change horses. The murderers had left their mark at that place also, and in front of the door was the stockman shot through the heart, and stone dead.

"The men selected a number of animals, and after our never-failing stimulant, a cup of coffee, and a piece of broiled meat, we were in the saddle again, and galloping towards the next station, where I knew it would be impossible for the convicts to obtain fresh horses, as sheep only were kept there.

"At twelve o'clock we reached the station, and drew up at the door. There was no sign of life about the premises, and with sad misgivings, I dismounted, and entered the hut; but I started back in horror, for on the floor were a dozen men, motionless and lifeless, as I at first thought; but a closer examination convinced me that they were bound hand and foot, and their mouths gagged.

"It may seem to you incredible, but it is nevertheless true, and only

proves what resolute men can accomplish when opposed to weakness. Twelve men were surprised and bound, and made to lie flat on their backs at the word of command, and so well did they obey the instructions of the murderers, that the latter, very probably, were too much pleased with their compliance to waste powder on them.

"I did not upbraid them with their cowardice, for I know what human nature is, and perhaps, had I been of the party, I might have submitted to the same degradation.

"There was one thing that I learned from the released prisoners that pleased me. The convicts had left their horses at the station, and expressed a determination to return in a few hours' time for them. Where the villains had gone they did not know, or in what direction they departed. A native, however, who was employed at the station, searched for their footsteps, and was not long in finding them.

"The trail led to the woods, and the men stationed at the hut expressed an opinion that the convicts were in search of a gang of bushrangers, that had been secreted in the vicinity for many months, but had recently disbanded, and gone to the mines.

"I expected that the murderers would return to the hut for their horses, when they found that the men they wished to join were no longer organized as a gang; so bidding the men conceal the horses, and retire within the walls of the stock-house, I waited hour after hour for them to come in sight.

"About four o'clock, my wish was gratified. Two stout, black-whiskered, desperate looking men, with rifles in their hands, and revolvers in their belts, came in sight, and advanced towards the hut, conversing in earnest tones, and apparently unsuspicious of the change that had taken place during their absence.

"I can only account for their boldness in returning, by the supposition that they had been so long accustomed to see men tremble when they raised their deadly weapons, that they were regardless whether the prisoners had released themselves or not.

"In fact, when the two convicts were advancing, I looked around on the numerous stockmen, and was surprised to see that they trembled and turned pale; and yet they were surrounded by twelve policemen, as brave as Melbourne could produce.

"When the convicts were within a dozen paces of the door, they suddenly stopped, surprised by the number of prints of horses' feet which they discovered in the soft earth. They glanced suspiciously at the hut, and cocked their rifles, and debated the question as to whether they should advance or retire.

"The latter course was decided on, and as they turned to go, I ordered half a dozen of our light carbines to be discharged at their retreating forms.

"The effect was like magic, for, although both were wounded, yet instead of endeavoring to make their escape, they turned towards the hut, and charged towards it with a cheer and a yell, as though determined to have blood for their injuries.

"Almost before the remainder of my men could bring their guns to a cock, the villains were upon us, discharging their revolvers to the right and left, and creating such a scene of confusion as I never wit-

nessed before. The stockmen endeavored to make their escape from the windows, and those who could not squeeze through, tried to shelter themselves behind my men, and some of the cowards even seized the police around their waists, and held them as shields to ward off the shots which were flying thick in that little square room, densely crowded with human beings.

"I saw two of my men fall, owing to the struggle which the station men made to escape, and then fearful that we should all be defeated and murdered, I seized a carbine that one of my people had dropped, and with a blow, I struck one of the murderers senseless to the ground.

"The remaining one fought like a demon. After discharging the contents of two revolvers which he carried about his person, he drew his bowie knife and rushed into our midst, cutting to the right and left; and so impetuous was his onset that we fell back a few feet, which the villain seeing, turned and attempted to escape. Before he had taken two steps towards the door, my men recovered from their surprise, and rushed upon him. He fought like a devil, and his knife was red with the heart's blood of one of my bravest men, before he was lying powerless, with irons on his hands and ankles, at our feet.

"The villain that I had struck senseless, now began to show signs of animation; but before he had recovered, he was loaded down with irons, and a watch placed over both, with orders to blow their brains out if they made the least attempt to escape.

"You would hardly expect that men, conquered as they were, and momentarily expecting death at our hands, would have the hardihood to boast of their deeds, and plan other crimes in case of their escape. Yet those convicts dared to tell me to my face that we should never live to reach Melbourne, and death was far from their thoughts.

"I had a great mind to end their days on the spot; but doubtful of my authority in the premises, and fearing their deaths would be the subject of a judicial examination, prevented me. My men, half of them wounded, and three dead, were frantic for the villains' blood, and it was with difficulty that I could restrain them.

"I attended to the injuries of the men as well as I was able, and then making the stockmen provide as good a supper as they could get, we satisfied our appetites; but even while doing so, sleep overpowered us, so tired were we with our long journey.

"I determined to halt for that night at the station, and let the men get recruited. One of the stockmen and one of my men were placed on guard over the prisoners, and relieved every two hours during the night, with express orders to shoot them if they moved hand or foot in the way of attempting to escape, was the means of keeping the murderers quiet, and enabling my men to attain that rest which they stood so much in need of.

"Not to tire you too much with minute particulars, we next day buried our killed and started for Melbourne, where we arrived safe with our prisoners, and a few days afterwards they were hung in the jail-yard."

"Maurice," said the lieutenant to the sentinel at the door, who had been listening to the recital, "do you wish to meet with two more such villains?"

"God forbid, your honor," answered Mauriee, crossing himself; for he was a devout Catholic. "I have hardly recovered the use of my arm where the devils struck me with a knife."

By the time the lieutenant had concluded, and we had drank a strong cup of tea, the sun was just setting behind the dark forest, which we had penetrated the day before, and word was passed from mouth to mouth to bring up the horses and get ready for a start.

CHAPTER XI.

Sagacity of a Dog.—A Night's Adventures.

"Gentlemen," asked Lieutenant Murden, as the policeman brought the horses to the door, "I hope you know how to ride."

"We have done a little in that line," answered Fred.

"Then I shall allow three of my men to remain behind, to lend the stockman and his daughter such assistance as they may want, while Smith and yourselves will take their animals. Now, then, mount."

We slung our rifles over our shoulders by the means of leather straps, and in a few minutes were cantering across the prairie at an easy gait, and in the direction of the bushrangers' late retreat.

It was near nine o'clock when we reached the edge of the forest, and drew up near the spot where we had entered the day before by the secret path.

The stillness of the woods was oppressive; for not a tree waved its bough, nor did a breath of air sigh over the plain. The night owl alone sent forth its discordant shriek, as though troubled with ominous forebodings regarding its future fate, and was protesting against them.

"This silence is more dreadful than the howling of wolves," cried Fred, at length, as he sat in his saddle, and regarded the dark forest before him.

"Those trees, if they could speak, would tell of tales of blood and cruelty, equal to that which I related yesterday," said Murden, after a short pause.

"And do you think that there are other gangs of bushrangers concealed in those dark recesses?" I asked.

"There must be near half a dozen different ones, for it's the most extensive forest in Australia; and ten thousand soldiers, with every equipment necessary, would be obliged to retire from its shades, baffled and defeated, before a few hundred men who knew the ground thoroughly."

"Well, let us get beyond the range of a bullet," cried the lieutenant, after a moment's pause; and as we presented a fair mark for any robber who might be in ambush, we were not slow to turn our horses' heads and trot a short distance from such dangerous concealment.

We were about to dismount, and post our sentinels, when I heard a

deep bay in the direction of the stockman's hut, which recalled to my mind the many scenes through which Fred and myself had passed since the same sound had first broken upon our ears.

"Do you hear any thing?" I asked, of my companion, pausing to listen.

"No," he replied; "why do you inquire?"

"Did you, Smith, hear no sound that is familiar to your ear?"

"No, sir," he replied, pressing forward, "I did not hear any sound but the shrieking of yonder owl."

"Our friend is getting nervous," cried Murden, with a laugh.

"There," I cried, suddenly, as a deep bay, many miles distant, came floating over the prairie, "you must have heard that howl. The hound is on our trail, and his following us at this time of night means something."

"You are right," said Fred, quietly; "I could distinguish that dog's bay amid a hundred. Let us return, lieutenant, and find out what has happened at the hut."

Murden laughed at our folly, as he termed it, and could not be induced to understand that the animal was endowed with rare instinct; and even when we related how he had sought us out on the night that Black Darnley had murdered his master, he tried to argue that it was purely accidental; but even while we debated, the bays of the hound grew louder and nearer as the scent became fresher, and while we were listening attentively, as the animal searched along the edge of the woods for a trail, I thought I heard the report of firearms, but at such a distance, that I did not venture to call attention to my surmise.

In a few minutes the dog was with us, bounding towards Fred and myself, as we sat on our horses, and seeking to attract our attention by a number of artifices. With a low whine, he would look in the direction of the hut, where his mistress was supposed to be, and then trot off a short distance, when, finding that we paid no attention to his movements, he would return and whine as though his heart was breaking by our coldness, in refusing to notice his appeals.

"I can't stand this any longer," cried Fred, suddenly. "Lieutenant, if you will not lead your troop back to the stock-hut, Jack and myself will go alone. I am satisfied that there is something wrong going on there, and that the dog has been sent by the old convict to recall us."

"What can have happened to them since we left? There were no indications of bushrangers in that quarter, and to return would be waste of time," returned the commanding officer.

"Then we will go alone. We should like Smith as a companion if you have no objections; but as the horses are under your charge, we will leave them, and walk to the hut. If matters are right there, we can join you by daylight in the morning."

As Fred spoke, he dismounted, and I was about to imitate his example, when Murden altered his mind.

"Do you think," he said, with all the warmth of an honest John Bull, "that I will permit you two Don Quixotes to leave me, and cross this wide prairie on foot, at this time of night. No, sirs. If you are determined to go, thinking there is fighting, why, I am bound to accompany you, and get my share. A quick trot, men, and keep in a compact body."

The men, without a murmur at the sudden order, struck their spurs into their horses' sides, and followed us at a gallop, the dog leading the way in the direction of the stock-hut, and no longer uttering loud bays.

An hour quickly passes when there is something to occupy the mind, and at the end of that time we were not more than half a mile from the house which we had left at sundown.

"You see," said the lieutenant, "your surmises were groundless. We have had our journey for nothing, and for once the dog has proved a false prophet."

I began to fear that I had rendered myself liable to ridicule, and was thinking how I should recede, when the sharp report of a gun was heard, in the direction which we were travelling.

"The d——!" cried Murden, suddenly; "I know the sound of my carbines as well as I know when pay-day comes. That gun was discharged by one of my fellows, and there is trouble, or he would have been asleep before this."

Three or four flashes of light were seen, and then the report of an irregular volley was heard, as though some force outside of the hut was firing at it from spite.

"The affair is explained," the lieutenant said; "a gang of bushrangers have attacked the hut, and my men are defending it bravely. Forward, men, to the rescue."

"One second," cried Fred, laying his hand on Murden's arm. "Let us reason for a moment, because there is no pressing haste; those in the hut can keep twenty men at bay until daylight, and I think if we use a little stratagem, we can secure a few of the gang, and run but little risk."

"Speak quick," cried the impatient officer, who longed to be where he could smell the burning powder, and as another discharge of muskets was heard, he almost broke away from the cool, indifferent Fred.

"There are two suggestions which I have to offer," Fred said. "In the first place, the party that is attacking the station think that the force under your charge is gone for the night."

"Well, what then?" cried Murden.

"Or else the party, not knowing that your command is near here, rallied to avenge the death of Black Darnley and his comrades. Now, if we charge up to the very door of the station, we shall most probably get a volley, not only from the bushrangers, who will hear the sound of the horses' feet, but as likely as not receive a shot from our friends."

"At any rate, we can capture two or three of the villains," cried the officer.

"I doubt it," answered Fred. "Knowing that they will have to raise the siege, two or three saddles will be emptied, and when we seek to return their fire, we shan't find an enemy to contend against. They will scatter in various directions if their force is small; and if large, why, a bushranger is a dangerous foe, and fights with a halter around his neck. Let us oppose craft to craft, and surprise the scamps, as they have surprised us."

"But how?" asked Murden.

"You have never lived in a country where waging war against Indians is regarded as mere pastime, or you would have comprehended my mean-

ing. Let us dismount from our horses where we are, and let my friend and myself steal forward, and mingle with the bushrangers; or if that is impracticable, find out their numbers, and whether they have made any impression on the hut — where the main body is stationed, and whether they suspect the presence of your force. An hour will be ample time to go and return. What say you to the proposition?"

"I like it," answered the lieutenant, after a moment's musing; "but I object to one thing."

"Name it."

"The idea of your going forward and exposing your lives in a service that does not concern you. You remain with my men, and I alone will venture into the midst of these villains."

"And let the Australian government lose a valued officer? No, sir, stay with your men, and let Fred and myself do the scouting duty," I said.

"But you're not going without me," Smith exclaimed, abruptly; "I made a bargain with you, gentlemen, to take you to the mines, and I'm not going to lose sight of you for a moment."

"You shall go with us, Smith," we answered; and I could feel the warm pressure of the honest fellow's hand at being allowed the privilege of still adhering to our fortunes, although the duty which we were about to enter upon was one fraught with no common danger.

"I don't see but that I shall be obliged to give my consent, after all," Murden said; "if you are rash enough to thrust your heads into the lion's mouth, why, take my best wishes for your success, and start at once. Ah, there speaks one of my carbines again. The garrison is on the alert."

As we started on our expedition, the hound, which had been lying near without a sign of impatience, bounded to his feet and led the way. We debated for a moment as to the expediency of allowing him to accompany us; but while discussing the question, he returned, and, as though guessing that he was the subject of our talk, looked into our faces and uttered a low whine.

"Let him go with us," I pleaded; "I'll warrant that he'll prove discreet."

The animal planted his fore paws upon my shoulder, and sought to lick my face, in gratitude. It might have been accidental, but to me it looked as though there was something besides animal instinct in the act.

There was a unanimous vote in favor of the dog, and we once more started on our way.

Gun after gun was discharged, both by besiegers and besieged; but as the night was dark, and it was very evident that those in the hut did not understand the Indian mode of warfare, of firing at the flash of their enemies' pieces, it was pretty certain that not much harm was done to the bushrangers.

"Come," said Fred, in a whisper, after we had watched the conflict for a short time, "let us forward and count the number of our opponents, and perhaps make a prisoner. Smith," he continued, addressing our stout friend, "I need not tell you to be cautious, and make no reply if you chance to encounter one of the scamps, and he speaks. The tones of your voice would betray us if the party is small. Now let us

move forward and take up our positions near yonder clump of bushes by the bank of the stream."

Fred led the way, and by his side walked the dog, with head erect, and eyes glaring like balls of fire; but not a single yelp issued from his capacious throat, as we strode towards the bushes and concealed ourselves.

We had not remained long at our station before two men passed us, talking earnestly together; and we learned enough to know that the presence of the police was not suspected by the bushrangers, and that the party attacking the hut was one got up for the purpose of avenging the death of Black Darnley and his gang.

Smith's cart, filled with merchandise when we started, had been rifled of every thing which it contained of value, and I could hear the poor fellow groan as he thought of his loss.

"I tell you, Jim," cried one of the gang, "we are only wasting time here; let's pack up what we've got, and be off. Bill says that he saw a police force on the road day before yesterday, and our wasting so much powder may bring 'em to this spot."

"And let the death of Darnley go unrevenged?" exclaimed the ruffian addressed; "I'm blastedly ashamed of you, to hear a man talk that way! You knows as well as I does that these fellers has got all the money that Darnley's gang has made for six months past, and now there's a chance of making a spec you want to be off."

"But I don't like the idea of getting nabbed by the police. I'm well known, and curse 'em, there'd be a jolly time in Melbourne if they could put the hemp around my neck."

"Your neck's no more precious than mine," replied the second bushranger; "I for one don't quit this place till I've cut the throat of every man in the hut. I'll learn 'em to attack our people. They shall be made examples of."

"Well, Jim," replied the milder ruffian, "if you have set your heart on fighting 'em, why, I'll stand by. But let's make short work of it, and storm the hut without delay."

"And lose half of our gang, hey?" answered the bushranger. "There's good marksmen in the hut, as the death of Sam just now should convince you. We can't afford to throw away men, as we've none too many to do the work."

"Then how are we going to get at 'em?"

"I'll tell you the plan I've hit on, and I think we needn't lose more than one man in putting it into execution. Remove every thing from that cart, and let half a dozen men keep up a brisk fire in front of the hut, while I with the rest, will take the team to the back of the shanty. We can push it close under the roof and shelter ourselves from the fire of those within, if they discover the trick, which I don't think they will. By starting a board or two, without much noise, we can command every part of the room, and pour in half a dozen volleys without being injured."

"That is a deused good idea, and I'll go and tell the boys. They've got hold of that keg of rum, and I suppose I shall have hard work to choke 'em off; but they must leave it for a while, and attend to business."

The two bushrangers, who appeared to be the leaders of the gang, separated, one stealing towards the object of his attack, and the other hastening in the direction of the ford which crossed the stream — possibly where the men were carousing.

"My poor goods," whined Smith, "the cursed brutes have stolen them all. I wish that keg of rum had a pound of arsenic in it; there would be some consolation in knowing that the devils were destroying themselves."

"Hush!" cried Fred, for that instant the growl of the dog gave token that some one was approaching. With one hand on the animal's leather collar to restrain him, and another on his massive jaws, we waited his approach.

The bushranger walked with hasty step towards us, and then suddenly stopping, he spoke aloud,—

"Jim," he said, evidently thinking that he should find his companion still there, "the men won't leave their rum; come and speak to the devils."

He turned in every direction to get sight of his companion, and as he was facing the hut, I felt a warm pressure from Fred's disengaged hand, and understood him without a word being spoken.

We noiselessly arose, and relinquished our hold of the dog; but strange to say the animal appeared to understand our movements, and did not spring forward as we feared he would. He looked into our faces, wagged his tail, and remained silent.

"Jim!" cried the bushranger, in a louder tone of voice than he had used before, "Jim, the boys —"

He had no time to utter more. Fred placed his strong hands around the fellow's throat, and compressed his grasp until I fancied I heard bones crack; at the same moment I dropped upon my knees, and seizing both his legs we had him at our mercy. He kicked violently, and struggled manfully, but in spite of all we bore him to the bushes, when Smith, beginning to understand our attack, uttered a chuckle of delight, and threw his whole weight upon the prostrate bushranger, and began to bind his arms with cords which he always carried about him in case of need.

Even the hound was not idle, for standing over the astonished ruffian, with his powerful jaws in close proximity to his face, he showed such a set of strong teeth that the bushranger manifested many symptoms of terror, and endeavored to move from such a dangerous neighborhood of ivory.

The feet and hands of the robber were soon bound by the active Smith, and then holding a knife at his throat, with an understanding that it should be plunged into him if he gave an alarm, Fred relinquished his grasp, and asked a few questions.

"How many are in your gang to-night?" Fred inquired.

The villain looked from one face to the other, as though he was almost resolved to evade the question; but receiving no encouragement from the scowling countenances which he encountered, replied,—

"There's twelve of us."

"Who's your leader?" he demanded.

"Jim Gulpin."

"As big a scamp as ever went unhanged!" ejaculated Smith; "I have heard of his tricks, before."

"What is your object in attacking the stock-hut?"

"To recover the gold which was stolen from Darnley, and also to revenge his loss."

"And you expect to succeed?" demanded Fred, ironically.

The bushranger made no reply, and as we had got all the information that we expected, and had other work in view, we gagged him, and had just secured the wretch, when a low growl from the hound attracted our attention.

"If this is the leader," whispered Smith, "you had better let me have a clip at him first, as he is a man of great strength, and a regular dare-devil!"

"You may pin his arms, while Jack looks out for his feet," replied Fred.

"I understand," answered Smith, and we fell back into the darkest shade of the bushes, as Jim came in sight.

He walked with a hasty step towards the spot where his companions were drinking, and we knew that they must be getting drunk quite fast, for more than once had we heard their voices mingled with oaths and execrations.

We stole after him, following on tiptoe to prevent our steps from being audible, and at a given signal, threw ourselves upon his burly form.

Although taken by surprise, he readily shook us off and gained his liberty. Once did he free one of his arms from Smith's embrace, and brought it down upon that unfortunate man's head with a clang that sounded as though he had fractured his skull; the stout-hearted Englishman only clung the closer.

Once the bushranger, by his desperate struggles, freed his neck from Fred's vice-like compression; but instead of using his voice in calling for help, as a more cowardly man would have done, he uttered fierce invectives and expressions of defiance.

We bore him to the earth and closed his mouth, and threatened with steel, but he still defied us; and not until his limbs were securely bound, and a piece of Smith's flannel shirt was thrust into his mouth, and the hound standing over him, expressing, by his deep growls, the most intense desire to taste the robber's flesh, did he become calm and submit to his fate with resignation.

"Curse you," muttered Smith, "what have you done with my goods?"

"Never mind the goods now, Smith," said Fred. "We shall find them all, I think, when we capture the gang. Do you take care of the prisoners, and above all things, keep them quiet. Jack and myself will take a near survey of the rest of the robbers, and then return."

"I'll keep them quiet—never fear," replied Smith, and he glanced towards his long knife in an unmistakable manner.

We followed the edge of the stream along for a few rods—each step bringing us nearer the voices which we had heard while lying in ambush; and although the bushrangers were sensible enough not to build a fire to reveal their location, yet the clamor which they raised while

drinking from Smith's cherished keg of rum, was sufficient to lead a party to their seclusion without fear of being discovered.

We skulked behind a clump of bushes, and for a few minutes listened to the conversation. Oaths, robbery, and murder were themes as common on their lips as prayers from a minister desirous of getting an increase of salary.

"We have heard enough of this, Fred," I said. "Let us return, bring up Murden and his party, and take the villains alive."

"Agreed," cried my companion; and retracing our steps, we were once more by the side of Smith, who sat, in company with the hound, watching his two prisoners with great diligence.

"Your keg of rum is a blessing, Smith," I said. "The bushrangers are taking to it finely, and in an hour's time they will be unconsciously drunk."

"We are now going to join Murden and his policemen, and bring them up for the purpose of capturing the remainder of the gang."

"Good — I'll wait here with these two, and give a good account of them when you return. Let me keep the dog," he said, as the hound rose to follow us.

I spoke a few words to the animal, and he quietly returned to the chief bushranger, and laid down by his side with a brilliant show of teeth.

There had not been a shot fired from the hut for more than half an hour. The inmates were evidently puzzled at the silence of those on the outside, and as the gang were too busy getting drunk to attend to business, it was not probable that another attempt would be made before our return.

Ten minutes' brisk travelling brought us in sight of Murden's force. They were on the alert, for we were challenged as we drew near, but were received joyfully by the officer and his men. They suspected, from the sudden ceasing of the guns, that we had been surprised; and it was with the utmost astonishment that they listened to an account of the capture of the two men.

"We will lose no time," cried the lieutenant. "Mount, men, and proceed."

As we trotted towards the hut, Fred suggested to give those on the inside an intimation of our presence, and as they would be likely to recognize the voice of their officer sooner than any body else, Murden rode to the door, dismounted, and rapping, spoke to his men in tones they well knew.

The bars were removed cautiously, but when convinced that their officer was speaking, the men were overjoyed. They rushed out to be congratulated by their comrades, and tell the short story of their siege. But there was no time to lose, if we desired to capture the bushrangers; so, leaving the horses in charge of one man, we joined Smith, and finding that his prisoners were safe, left them in charge of the dog, and then walked rapidly in the direction of the gang, still swilling from the rum keg.

They did not suspect our presence, although we heard a number of calls for their chief, and a few drunken surmises as to the reason of his long absence; and in the midst of their discussion, the loud voice of Murden rang out, —

"Surrender, villains, you are surrounded!"

We could hear them start to their feet, and search for their guns, and then whisper together; and then a deep-toned voice exclaimed, —

"Who asks us to surrender?"

"The police of Melbourne!" cried Murden.

"Curse the police of Melbourne! Come, my hearties, let's give it to the fools!"

An irregular discharge of half a dozen muskets followed his words, and a man at my side was struck down, and wounded terribly. He was shot through the heart, and died instantly.

Their firing revealed their position, and we saw that they were determined to rush to close quarters, and try the odds, drunk as they were. Murden no longer hesitated.

"Give them a volley, my men," he cried; and the police, enraged at the loss of a comrade, poured in a murderous discharge from their carbines.

Yells and imprecations followed, and loud above the groans we could hear one or two shouting that they would surrender, and begging the police not to fire again. Murden granted their prayer, and when daylight made its appearance, the dead bodies of four bushrangers, and three mortally wounded, were lying by that quiet stream, the waters of which received their blood, and bore it to the ocean.

CHAPTER XII.

Discovery of a Masonic Ring. — Funeral Pyre of Black Darnley.

Knowing the treacherous character of the bushrangers, Murden would not allow one of his men to venture to the assistance of the wounded robbers. He formed a circle around them, and with carbines on the cock, his force waited until daylight before relieving their wants.

In vain Fred and myself offered to venture among the wounded, and take to them water. Murden would not listen to the proposal for a moment; not that he was naturally hard-hearted, but he knew the men whom he had to deal with better than ourselves; and he imagined that we should get a few inches of cold steel for our charity.

As daylight appeared, one by one of the gang that had escaped uninjured, were called out, manacled, and confined to a tree, to prevent all possibility of flight. There were many fierce oaths uttered by the wretches, as they felt the bracelets slipped over their wrists by Murden; and two of the hardened villains boasted of the murders which they had committed, and laid plans for a continuance of their crimes when they escaped, as they expected to do.

It was with difficulty that the policemen could be restrained; and once, when Murden was absent for a few moments, and had left the

charge of the prisoners to Fred and myself, one of the men, carried away by sudden rage at the taunts which the bushrangers hurled at him, raised his carbine, and if Fred had not struck up the barrel just as he did, the sheriff of Melbourne would have been spared the necessity of finding hemp for one robber. As it was, the ball whistled harmlessly over his head.

"You are mad!" cried Fred; "would you murder the wretches in cold blood?"

"Ay!" shouted the indignant policeman; "they have committed many murders, and it is time their career was ended."

"I grant that," returned Fred; "but these men are now in the hands of the law, and are entitled to a fair trial. You are paid for protecting them, as well as apprehending. Do not let your conscience ever accuse you of murdering a prisoner."

"You are right, sir," returned the policeman, with evident respect; "I was foolish to be so moved, and beg you to forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive," replied Fred, amused at the man's earnestness; "but if you wish to do a really good action, lend Jack and myself aid to bind up the wounds of these poor, grumbling wretches."

"That I will," cried the policeman, laying down his carbine, and following us to the bank of the river, where the sufferers were still lying, groaning with pain.

Just as we began washing the blood from their wounds, Murden joined us. He looked astonished to think that we took so much interest in the men, and after a moment's hesitancy, said, —

"I have been trying to arrange with Smith to return to Melbourne with his team, and carry these wounded men and my prisoners. He refuses to consent until he has obtained your acquiescence in the measure. I have told him that his goods, which are scattered around here, are nearly ruined by rough handling, and that he will have to sell them at a sacrifice at the mines. While he is gone, they can be stored at the hut, and sold most any time to travellers at an advance, while, if taken where the market is glutted, he is sure to lose on them."

We were so much surprised at the communication, that we looked at the lieutenant in astonishment, and for a few minutes did not answer.

"Come, come," said Murden, with a smile, "don't look as though you had lost all your friends. Say you will go with us. Two weeks' time is all we ask, and then you can go to the mines in any other part of the island you please."

"But you forget," I said, "that we are not rich, and can but ill afford this inactive life. We came to Australia to make a living, and so far, with the exception of the booty which we captured from Black Darnley's gang, we have not made a dollar. Even our prize money will have to be given up to the government, to be returned to its rightful owners, and besides ——".

"There, there, that will do, most honest Americans," said Murden, with a smile. "Now listen to me for a moment. You made a good thing by seizing on what treasure Darnley had. The government will be too rejoiced at his death to care whether he had money at the time he was killed, or not. Keep what you have got — say not a word about it to any one, for if you do, you will be the laughing-stock of all Aus-

tralia. The originality of the act would surprise our good people, and you would be looked upon as fit subjects for an insane asylum."

Fred and myself looked at each other, and I read in my companion's face that he considered the advice, in our present circumstances, as being sound and rational.

"We have resolved to keep the money," we said; but as for retracing our steps to Melbourne, we hardly think that it will pay. We have already been two weeks in the country, and have not dug the first ounce of gold."

"And you may be six months here, and yet be unable to do so. Let me reckon, and see how badly you have done. In the first place, there are one thousand pounds reward offered for Darnley, dead or alive. Prove to me that he is dead, and the money is your own. For every bushranger killed or captured, one hundred pounds are offered, and I need not tell you that we have twelve here which I can verify — four dead, two wounded, and six prisoners. That is not a bad night's work, I should think."

"But we think it wrong to accept of money for shedding human blood," Fred said.

"But you don't think it wrong to delay your journey half a dozen days for the purpose of hunting men who would have cut your throats for a sixpence. Throw aside all such ideas of propriety, and remember that you are in a country where the struggle for gold engrosses all other passions; men will look upon you as fools, to reject that which you are entitled to. Go with me to Melbourne. Help escort these villains to the city, for remember my force is weakened now, and I promise that you shall receive more pay for the service than you can make at the mines."

"It is to help me to freedom," cried Smith, who had approached us unperceived, during our conversation, and had listened to it attentively.

"For you we will do any thing, old friend," we said, extending our hands to the honest convict, who grasped them eagerly, and shed tears of joy at the fair prospect which he possessed of once more being called a free man.

After making up our minds in regard to the course which we intended to pursue, we entered into the spirit of the undertaking with our whole hearts. We prepared lint and bandages, and bound up the wounds of the bushrangers, and placed them beneath the roof of the hut which they had endeavored to storm the night before. After we had accomplished this painful duty, we selected a place for the burial of those killed.

Beneath the branches of a cedar tree we scooped out the earth with a broken shovel, and then were about to place the bodies of the bushrangers in the grave, when the glistening of a ring on the middle finger of the right hand of one of the dead men attracted my attention. I stooped down and removed the ring, and attentively examined it.

To my surprise, I found that it bore the emblems of the masonic fraternity — a square and compass upon a broad disk, while on each side were small flakes of gold in their native state, placed layer upon layer, like the scales of a fish. The ring I judged to weigh near an

ounce, and was a massive hoop of gold, and made by some artist of rare talent.

I knew that the ruffian could not be a mason, and I was lost in conjecture, for a few moments, as to the probable fate of the owner. There was no doubt that the robber had taken a fancy to it, and to obtain possession, had undoubtedly committed murder. While it was passed from hand to hand, Smith suddenly exclaimed,—

"I knew the owner of this ring. It was I that freighted him and his goods to the mines. He was an American, and had had the ring manufactured in California expressly to order. I am certain that I am correct, for when we passed this very stream, the owner requested me to wear it while he bathed."

"But his name?" I asked.

"I only heard him called Edward by his companions; but I know that he was an American, and he said he belonged in New York, or New England city, I don't know which."

I could but smile at Smith's geography, although the scene before me was not well calculated to provoke mirth. I sighed over the unhappy fate of Edward, and handed the jewel to Murden, when he returned it, saying,—

"Keep it, my friend, and may you at some future day be enabled to trace the family of the owner, and tell them of the sad fate which their relative probably met."

[With this object in view, I have left the ring with the publishers of the American Union, thinking that probably these sketches might attract the attention of some person cognizant of the manufacture of the jewel, and the rightful ownership. The publishers in Boston will be happy to answer all questions concerning the property, and considering the scenes which the ring has gone through, it may indeed be regarded as a curiosity. I shall always retain the ring, and when I gaze at the emblems which are engraved upon it, my thoughts will wander back to the sad scenes which I witnessed while in Australia, and the violent death of the wearer.]

"In with the bodies," cried Murden, "we have much to do before sunset."

As soon as the grave was filled in, the troop regained their former jocularity, and they began dividing among themselves the property which they had found upon the persons of the bushrangers.

The amount was not large, not more than a hundred pounds, yet Murden received his share without a blush, appearing to think that he was doing no more than his duty. Even the dead policeman was remembered, and as he had left a widow in Melbourne, his portion was deposited with the lieutenant, to be paid to her. As Fred and myself were offered our portion, we declined, and begged that it might be given to the lady in question, which action on our part raised us in the estimation of the men immensely.

"Dare you venture across the prairie this forenoon?" asked Murden; "I would not ask you, were it not necessary to use all despatch to reach Melbourne as soon as possible; but to benefit you and your friends, the convicts, I must get a sight of Darnley and his gang."

"If that is your object," we replied, "we are prepared to accompany

you as soon as you are ready. Let us get a cup of coffee and a piece of broiled lamb, and then start."

"But my prisoners?" suggested the lieutenant.

"Leave them in charge of a portion of your men until we return," I replied.

"That is easily said; but while I am gone, my men, who are but human, will probably make free with that keg of rum, which I have thus far kept from their reach; and if they are without restraint, would be just as likely to let the prisoners escape, or shoot them, or get to quarrelling among themselves, as any thing else."

"Where is the keg?" asked Fred.

The officer poked aside some bushes where he had placed it, and revealed its hiding place.

"I'll soon quiet your anxiety," Fred said, and as he spoke he pulled out the spigot, and the Jamaica rum mingled with the earth.

"A harsh proceeding, but the best under the circumstances," cried the lieutenant, with a mournful look, as he heard the rum gush forth as though saying "good, good;" "I love a drop of good liquor, but men, when drinking, have no discretion."

Murden turned away with a sigh, as though the strong fumes which assailed his nostrils were suggestive of lost hopes, and for the remainder of the day, he was melancholy.

On reëntering the stockman's hut, we found him seated beside his daughter's rude couch, tenderly bathing her head with fresh river water. She was conscious now, but still very weak and feeble, and spoke in whispers. She held out her hand to us when we entered, and smiled, as though thanking us for the care which we had taken to revenge her injuries.

Her pulse we found to be more regular, and if she received no fresh shock, we thought there was a prospect of her being entirely well in a few days, and so we told her.

At our request Murden stationed one of his men at the door with strict orders to admit no one who would be likely to disturb her, and after we had partaken of our rude repast, we got ready for our hot ride over the plain to the forest.

Before we started, however, we paid a visit to the bushrangers, still chained to trees, and incapable of assisting each other. We were greeted with derisive shouts and fierce taunts, which did not disturb our equanimity in the least; and when the robbers discovered such to be the case, they again stretched themselves upon the ground, as well as their irons would permit, and relapsed into sullenness.

Murden left eight of his men to take charge of the prisoners, with strict orders for two of them to keep guard without rest or sleep. We were about to mount our horses, when a brawny ruffian we had made prisoner the night before shouted,—

"Aren't you going to give us something to eat, or are we to be starved like dogs? You are all cowards, and dare not give us fair play, and an open fight, but I didn't suppose that you were so frightened as to refuse to let us have a mouthful."

"Dress a sheep for them, and let them eat their fill," ordered Murden; "but mind that they escape not, on your lives."

We rode off, followed by the shouts and maledictions of the gang, and even when we were one hundred rods distant I could hear the ruffians call after us, bidding us return and learn bravery from them.

"You now know why I feared to leave the prisoners in charge of my men when a keg of rum was near at hand. The bushrangers, knowing that hanging is certain, would try and provoke a sudden and easier death. I do not fear the temper of the men when free from liquor."

Smith, Fred and myself, besides two policemen, composed the party, and regardless of the heat, which poured down as though it would melt our brains, we urged our panting horses over the plain, and hardly drew rein until we reached the edge of the forest, where we halted for consultation.

It was a bold experiment to venture with a small force to the retreat of the once formidable outlaw, for there was no telling whether or no a portion of his gang were living at his haunt. The officer looked up to us for advice, and we consulted the hound, which had accompanied us, and now stood by our sides panting and lolling out his great tongue, and wondering, I suppose, why we did not stop at the river.

"Let us dismount, and shade the animals as well as possible," I advised, "and then trust to the sagacity of the dog to detect an ambush. My life on his shrewdness."

The advice was acted on, when leaving one man to take charge of the animals, we examined our guns and pistols, and made sure that they were in order; and then, with a few words of encouragement to the hound, which he appeared to understand, we moved along the path we had travelled when on our first visit.

With guns on the cock, and examining every thicket of bushes to see if it concealed an enemy, we made but slow progress. Yet trusting more to the dog than to ourselves, we at length came in sight of the scene of our former exploits. All was quiet and still in the vicinity. Not a twig moved, unless displaced by a gaudy-colored parrot, too lazy, under the withering influence of the heat, to even chatter.

The hound had bounded into the enclosure, and rushed towards a pile of branches which had been placed in the clearing since we were there. Regardless of every thing else he tore away at the wood with his teeth, and uttered fierce growls, as though he had found an enemy beneath that pile, and was determined to get at him.

We sent a man to examine the neighborhood, and then went to our four-legged friend's assistance. With angry growls the dog helped us to throw aside the branches, but long before reaching the last one, we suspected the contents of the pile. A horrible stench had for some time warned us that we were in the vicinity of carrion.

The last branch was removed, and lying in all their ghastly ugliness were Black Darnley and his crew. Darnley had greatly altered since his death; but there was no mistaking that massive mouth, filled with strong teeth, firmly set together, as though striving even with his last breath to overcome the King of Terrors.

"Are you satisfied?" we asked of Murden, turning away from the sickening sight with a shudder.

"I am," he replied. "Black Darnley has committed his last crime

in this world; and the man who has caused the police of Australia to turn pale with fear is now but a home for worms."

"Let us rid the earth of his remains," cried Fred, "and not let them fester here to breed pollution in the air."

"Well said," replied we all; and after every one had satisfied his curiosity, we gathered up dry branches and leaves and heaped them upon the pile, and then set it on fire, and as the flames roared and crackled, and licked the green corpses, we took our leave of that black forest, the home of bushrangers, natives, and poisonous reptiles.

As we turned to have a last glance at the fire, we saw the hound stalking solemnly around that putrid pile, and watching as though not satisfied until every particle of his enemy had mingled with his mother earth.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Stockman and his Parrot.—Daring Plot of a Robber Chieftain.

Tired with a hot, dusty ride across the prairie, we felt more like resting after the sleepless night and busy scenes through which we had passed, than commencing our journey at sundown, and so we intimated to Murden; but he was deaf to our hints, and gave his orders for getting ready regardless of them.

A hasty supper of roast lamb and hot coffee was awaiting us when we returned from the water, and while we were eating, a number of the policemen were despatched along the banks of the river to drive in Smith's cattle, while others stored his goods, which they had collected during our absence, in the hut, and returned to the stockman a correct schedule of the same.

About sundown, the oxen were yoked together and attached to the cart. The horses were saddled, and awaited their riders, and the only thing that detained us was the transfer of the bushrangers from the trees to the cart in which they were to be transported to Melbourne. The wounded men were too seriously hurt to endure the journey, and, indeed, it was doubtful whether the poor wretches would survive many days, removed, as they were, hundreds of miles from a physician's reach, and with no fit nourishment to sustain them.

Murden, when we remonstrated against the wounded men being disturbed, and given an opinion of the fatality of the act, received the news with the utmost sang froid, and expressed no particular desire that the men should live, under any circumstances: and finding that he could do nothing with them, and that they would never survive the journey to grace his triumphant entry into Melbourne, he wisely turned them over to the care of the aged convict and his daughter, both of whom promised to take care of them to the best of their ability, and in case they recovered, to hold them close prisoners until the lieutenant sent an order for their delivery.

One by one the prisoners were transferred from the trees to the cart. Desperate was their resistance, and loud were the curses which were heaped upon our heads. Manacled as they were, with heavy handcuffs around their wrists, in some instances four men were required to lift one of the villains to his place in the team, and it was no easy task at that.

The police worked with patience, and never once lost their temper, although I expected every moment that they would resort to extreme measures. To keep the robbers quiet, and prevent their committing any violence on those who rode in the team, a stout, spare chain was passed from the forward end of the cart to the back part, and fastened underneath. To this the feet of the men were secured, so that it was impossible for them to move, or commit any sudden act of violence. The method was severe, but the only safe plan, and Murden was too old a hand at rogue-taking to adopt half-way measures.

At eight o'clock we were ready for our journey. Three of the police were to ride on the cart as a means of precaution, and Fred and myself were promoted to horses. Smith resumed his old position by the side of his cattle, and after an affectionate leave-taking with the old convict and his child, we started; but, to our surprise, the hound trotted along by my side, and all words or gestures were useless in forcing him to return to his mistress.

Knowing that she valued the animal, I rode back with him, and requested her to call him into the hut and close the door, but to my astonishment, she declined; and when I urged that I could not induce the animal to return unless I accompanied him, she requested me, in a quiet manner, to accept of him as a gift, and the only conditions that she imposed were, that I should treat him kindly during his life.

I joyfully accepted her offer, and once more saying good-by, I rejoined the troop, and with Rover, as I called the dog after I owned him, by my side, bounding towards me to receive a friendly pat on the head, as though he rejoiced in the change that had been made, I journeyed on, in company with Murden and Fred.

All night long did we urge the oxen to their quickest paces, so that we could reach a stock-hut by sunrise, where we could obtain food and rest, both of which we needed. A dozen times did I fall asleep in the saddle, only to awaken when I found that I was likely to pitch headlong to the ground, and when, by the sudden efforts which I made to recover myself, I got thoroughly awakened, I saw that my companions were equally as sleepy.

Had a strong force of bushrangers but attacked us that night, not a man would have been left to tell the story; for so thoroughly used up were the force, that I doubt if even the report of a gun could have roused them from their lethargy.

About daylight we left the main road, and took a course nearly parallel, over a plain where not a sign of a wagon wheel was visible. After we had lost sight of the road, we began to meet cattle grazing upon the prairie, and by their wildness, we imagined that visitors were a rare sight to them.

At length, two Australian natives were discovered, nearly naked, and armed with their favorite weapons, spears and boomerangs, squatting under a tree, and watching our cavalcade with great interest.

Murden spoke to them in their native language, of which he understood a little, and inquired the distance to a stock-hut; and with an almost imperceptible motion of their heads, they intimated the direction which we were to pursue, and then relapsed into their former state of stoicism.

"Some of our heaviest cattle-raisers are trying an experiment," said Murden, as we rode. "Thinking that these poor devils are fit for something, they are employing them to look after cattle on these immense plains. The plan has worked admirably so far, for they appear especially adapted for this kind of work, as it suits their idea of freedom and idleness."

"And what pay do they get?" I asked.

"Their pay is trifling, but they are assured of good, healthy food, and clothing if they will wear it, which in some cases they reject with disdain. Our countrymen have never treated the natives as human beings, and hence they have never looked upon us with any love; fear alone keeps them in subjection. A new theory is to be attempted, and with what success remains to be seen."

When we came in sight of the hut, we started our horses, and left the cart and men to follow at their leisure. The place was not very inviting, and did not reflect much credit on the stockman who had charge of the station.

The hut was built of rough boards, patched in a dozen different places with bullocks' hides, to keep out the rain in the winter, and the hot sun in the summer. A small shed was placed at one end of the house, under which all the cooking was done during wet weather.

Two upright sticks, with necks, on which a cross bar was placed, formed the fireplace, and that was all that was required by men who live on meat day after day, and year after year, until, as one stockman informed me, he "felt horns growing on the sides of his head."

Basking in the sun, which was high in the heavens, was a parrot, confined in a rough board cage, evidently whittled out with a jack-knife, during the leisure hours of its master. The bird was shrieking out a few words of unmistakable English, and appeared to utter them with the greatest glee, as though charmed by having a number of new listeners to whom it could show off its perfections.

"D—— it, where do you come from?" the bird yelled; and then changing his tune, he shouted, "take that dog away — take him away! take him away — cuss him!"

We could but feel amused at such proficiency in the English language, and were admiring the display of his rare talent, when the proprietor of the bird came to the door, evidently awakened from a nap by his protegé. He first told the parrot to "shut up," and then turned his languid attention on his visitors, whom he did not appear pleased to see, or indeed displeased. In fact, he seemed too lazy to exhibit much emotion any way; and the only energy he displayed was when he used his long, dirty finger nails on his head, the hair from which hung down on his shoulders in tangled masses, and afforded refuge to thousands of animals, that would have been homeless, had he had those locks clipped close to his skull.

The stockman was barefooted, and his feet looked tougher than any

sole leather ever brought to market. Dirt, a hot sun, and an entire absence of water as a cleansing agent, had rendered them of an indescribable color, and as he afterwards boasted, he was "not afeerd of any varmin biting them 'cre, 'cos they was toughened."

An old flannel shirt, and a pair of canvas trousers, completed the costume of a man who said he preferred to live on a cattle station, and receive about ten dollars per month, than to trust to luck, and work hard at the mines.

"Hullo, Bimbo," shouted the lieutenant, as the stockman came in sight, and leaned languidly against the door, as though too lazy to support his own weight.

The fellow muttered something which we did not hear, and Murden shouted again,—

"Did we disturb you from a refreshing nap, Bimbo, or have you grown lazier than ever? Come, stir yourself, and start a fire; we want breakfast. In a few minutes there will be a dozen more here, and they will eat you out of house and home, unless you are smart. Bushrangers always have good appetites."

It might have been fancy, but I thought I saw the indolent Bimbo suddenly start at the word "bushrangers," and his apparently heavy-looking eyes were lighted up with an energetic look that I little expected from a man such as his outward appearance denoted. Whether my surmises were correct or not, the man resumed his old habit in a moment, and if possible looked more fatigued than ever.

"I don't see what you want, coming here at this hour in the morning," Bimbo said, with a yawn. "I was just dreaming that I could live without work, when you roused me. What is up that takes you from Melbourne?"

The question was asked in the most indifferent tone that a person can imagine; but I thought I detected an eagerness to know the mission upon which Murden had been engaged that but ill compared with the man's general indifference and lazy deportment.

"We have been after bushrangers, Bimbo," answered the lieutenant, dismounting from his horse and approaching the stockman, who still retained his reclining position against the side of the door.

"And did you meet any?" asked the stockman, indifferently, stealing a look at the face of the officer as though anxious to obtain his answer before he uttered it.

"Meet any?" replied Murden, "why, of course we did. You will not be troubled with robbers in this part of the country for some time to come, I'll warrant you."

I saw a black frown gather on the stockman's brow, but it was dispelled as soon as formed, although I could not help feeling that the news troubled the man exceedingly.

"Come, stir yourself," cried the lieutenant, when he saw that the stockman did not appear disposed to move, and as he spoke, he laid his hand lightly upon the fellow's shoulder, and pulled him from his position in the doorway.

"Come, awaken, old fellow, and let us have the best quarter of beef you possess, for we are all hungry, and I'll warrant that Jim Gulpin and his gang ——"

"So help me, God, lieutenant," cried Bimbo, hurriedly, "I don't know him or his men, and I don't see what right——"

"Why, what is the matter with the man?" laughed Murden. "I didn't say that you knew him. I meant that he and his gang, or what remained of them, are my prisoners, and in less than a week their necks will be stretched a few inches longer. There's news for you, Bimbo."

"Gulpin and his band prisoners," I heard the fellow say, in an undertone, as though he could scarcely comprehend the news, and then an expression stole over his face, that for a moment was frightful to contemplate.

"Ah, here they come at last," Murden said, pointing to the cart, which was slowly creeping along, and had been screened from view by the house.

"You don't mean to say you and your men took the bushrangers without any 'sistance from others, do you?" Bimbo asked.

"Why, these two Americans lent their valuable aid," replied the officer, pointing to Fred and myself.

"P'raps it would have been as well if they staid in their own country and looked after robbers, instead of coming to Australia," replied the dirty scamp, with an aside glance at us that spoke murder as plainly as if he had a knife at our throats.

"Cease your grumbling," shouted Murden, angrily, "or I'll lay my bridle over your shoulders until they ache. Why, you miserable dog, have you not complained to me a dozen times that you feared your life was in danger from these same prowling gangs, and that they stole your cattle in spite of all you could do? Another word, and I'll give you cause for muttering. Away with you. Start a fire, and then I'll set one of my men to cook breakfast. You are too dirty to be intrusted with food."

Bimbo must have exercised a strong control over his emotions, for in spite of the dirt and grease with which his face was smeared, I saw it flush angrily; but no other sign of passion was displayed. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and with a slouching gait, as though too indolent to move without strong inducement, sauntered towards the shed and began kindling a fire.

"A grumbling cur," muttered Murden, looking after him; "I have half a mind to tie him up and scar his back, and see if it will not make him a little more energetic." But with all of the bluster of the officer, I saw that he did not suspect the man's honesty, and I was glad that he did not.

By the time Smith had joined us with his cart and prisoners, Bimbo had started a fire, and produced a hind quarter of a young bullock, killed the day before, and which had been rubbed over with fine salt to protect it from the millions of insects which infest the air of Australia. The fellow made an offer to cut the meat for us, but a look at his hands was sufficient to deter us from accepting the proposition.

Maurice, the lieutenant's never-failing resort when a meal was to be prepared, was set at work to get breakfast for the officer, Fred, and myself, while one of the men was detailed to perform the same duty for his companions. Another man was stationed as guard over the bushrangers, and the balance were ordered to look to their animals, which

attention consisted in watering them at a spring near the hut, and then turning them loose with their fore legs tied together to prevent their straying to any great distance. One animal, however, was kept ready saddled in case of an emergency, and not permitted to roam beyond the extent of a long rope, like the reattas of Spain or Mexico.

Although I must confess that I was intensely hungry, and tired and sleepy with my long journey on horseback all night, yet I felt too uneasy in my mind to spend much time eating greasy beefsteaks and drinking strong coffee. I had watched Bimbo from the time the cart had reached the hut to the period when the prisoners were to be allowed to eat their morning meal; and I had noticed the nervous manner in which the fellow had acted in spite of his assumed indifference.

Twice had he sauntered towards the cart in which the bushrangers were still confined, and each time had the sentry ordered him back, as no communication was allowed with the prisoners; but I saw the grim face of Jim Gulpin raised as he heard the voice of Bimbo, and an almost imperceptible sign passed between them.

More than ever convinced that there was an understanding with the parties, I watched for other tokens, but in vain; and it was not until one of the policemen ordered the stockman to carry the bushrangers' food to them that I determined to be present and keep an eye upon his actions.

The handcuffs were removed from the prisoners' wrists to enable them to eat, but the irons were not taken from their feet, for Murden had no idea of trusting them with their liberty even for a moment.

"Here's your grub," shouted Bimbo, who was allowed to pass the sentry this time, as he had a wooden pail in his hand, none too clean, in which the food of the prisoners was placed. "Here it is," he continued, as he set it down in their midst, "and a darn'd sight too good for you it is too, and mighty thankful you had oughter be that you fell into a gentleman's hands, and one that knows how to treat you. If I had the right I'd starve you all, blast your pieters."

The ruffians replied with oaths and jeers, but they were too energetic to be sincere, and I suspected they were intended expressly for my ear, as I stood not far from them listening to every word that was uttered.

Had the bushrangers not said so much, I should have suspected less, and while I pretended to be admiring the parrot, I still watched the doings in the cart.

I saw the stockman glance around to see if his actions were observed, and that stealthy look was like a cat's watching for its prey — I saw that the sentry was examining the lock of his carbine, and paying no attention to Bimbo's movements, while the rest of the men were engaged in smoking and lounging near — and then for a moment the heads of Jim Gulpin and the stockman were close together, as though whispering confidentially. It was only for an instant, however. With renewed oaths and abuse Bimbo hurried the robbers in their meal, until Murden interfered, and ordered that they be allowed to eat in peace.

"The idea of letting such scamps as these eat," cried Bimbo, with a kick of his bare, horny foot against one of the bushranger's ribs. "I'd sarve 'em if I had my way."

Bimbo was replied to with interest by the robbers, and to stop the noise the lieutenant sent the fellow to the hut to get it ready for the reception of the latter, as it was thought to be a good place to keep them during our halt, which we expected to extend to sundown, owing to the intense heat of the day.

The robbers were removed to the hut, and their manacles taken from their feet, but the handcuffs still confined their hands, and as they were chained two by two they were powerless. A sentry was posted, and the men, glad to obtain a few hours' sleep, stowed themselves under the shed, and wherever they could screen their faces from the sun.

Fred and myself, taking our saddles for pillows, repaired to the back part of the hut, the coolest place we could find, and in a few minutes both of us were sleeping soundly. I had not slept long, however, before I was awakened by a peculiar noise, that sounded like the grating of a saw. Instead of starting up to investigate, I pretended to sleep, and partly opening one eye, saw to my surprise that Bimbo was on his knees near my feet, and working with cautious energy upon a board which he was endeavoring to remove. The instrument he was operating with was an old knife, with notches on the blade, made to resemble a saw.

I continued my position, and by my regular breathing convinced the fellow that I was sleeping soundly. A dozen times did he pause and listen, and scrutinize my face, and then I read the man's true character in his wicked eyes, for they gleamed like those of a serpent, and I saw murder in every look.

I resolved to continue counterfeiting, and await the result. Half a dozen times did Bimbo suspend work, and steal to the front part of the hut to discover if his operations were suspected, and each time he returned, and after a glance at Fred and myself, commenced work with renewed energy.

At length a hole large enough to run his hand in was obtained, and then I heard low whispers pass between Bimbo and the robber chief.

"You must get us out of this scrape," said Jim, authoritatively.

"But how can I at present? Better wait till night, and then I know half a dozen coves what will strike for you. We can easily get ahead and wait for you near the Three Forks."

"It wont do," said Gulpin, impatiently. "Go and pick the pocket of the man that has got the key of our irons, and then we can kill every devil connected with the troop."

"Hush," replied Bimbo, after a hurried glance at my face. "Them two blasted Yankees are sleeping close here, and I think both of 'em has spotted me. I'd like to cut their throats bloody well."

"I have no doubt of it," I thought, "but I'll save you the trouble."

"Go and get the key," repeated Gulpin, with an oath, "and then pass in all the guns and knives that you can get hold of. When I give a signal, knock down the sentry at the door, and mind that you hit him hard enough to prevent his squalling — you understand?"

"Yes, yes; but if I do all that, what share'll I get in the swag in the cellar? I've kept it for a long time now, and you know it."

"You shall have Darnley's share, if you do as I tell you," replied Gulpin.

"What'll Darnley say to that?"

"He won't say much, 'cos he's stiffened out — dead as the devil."

This piece of information so elated the stockman that he did not stop to make further inquiries, but disappeared around the corner of the house, and when I raised my head to consult with Fred in regard to the matter, I found that he was as wide awake as myself, and was apparently debating what course he should pursue.

"Have you heard all?" I whispered.

Fred nodded his head, and laid his hand upon his lips. Then, by a gesture which I understood, he counselled that we should remain quiet for a short time, and see how matters worked.

Following this advice, however, did not prevent us from examining our revolvers and rifles, and also bringing the handles of our bowie knives to a better position. When Bimbo returned, with a cat-like tread, I could see by his carrying a carbine that he had been successful; and when I saw him thrust it into the hole, and then give up the key of the irons, I had a great mind to shoot him on the spot.

"Here," cried Bimbo, "is the key of the ruffles. Remain quiet for half an hour, and by that time I'll be ready for you. Remember your word — Darnley's share."

"All right!" exclaimed the robber, grasping with his manacled hand the precious key to his irons, and as soon as he had possession of it, Bimbo glided away to complete his plot.

"We must be acting," said Fred, springing to his feet; and as he spoke we sauntered to the front of the hut, and saw that the stockman was just raising a carbine, which he had taken from a sleeping policeman.

Bimbo looked astonished when he caught sight of us, and I saw by the flashing of his eyes that he was almost determined to begin the battle immediately, and trust to the robbers for the result.

If such was his intention, however, he had no time to carry it into effect, for with a sudden spring Fred landed in front of him, and with a blow of his fist knocked the dirty fellow down, and before he could rise a revolver was pointed at his head, and instant death threatened, if he moved.

The noise awakened Murden and his men; and just as they began inquiring the reason of our violence, there was a loud shout heard within the hut, the door was rudely thrown open, and at the head of the robbers, brandishing his carbine, was Gulpin.

The police fell back a few paces in astonishment; but a rallying cheer from Murden reassured them, and in spite of the known desperate characters of the bushrangers, they charged on them.

Gulpin did not stop to discharge the weapon which he held, but swinging it over his head he brought it down upon the skull of the foremost man, with a crash, shivering the gun into a hundred pieces, and knocking the fellow senseless.

Gulpin did not wait to repeat the blow, but eluding the many hands thrust out to seize him, he sprang one side, and leaving his gang to continue the unequal combat, ran swiftly across the prairie, as though determined to escape at all hazards, even if his gang were captured.

"The villain will escape!" shouted Murden, more anxious to secure the person of Gulpin than his men.

The lieutenant rushed to the shed to mount the horse usually kept in readiness, but Bimbo had turned him loose upon the plain.

With a bitter oath the officer grasped one of his men's carbines and discharged its contents after the runaway. The ball flew wide of its mark, and we could hear a taunting laugh from the fugitive, at his aim.

"Show me a specimen of your American skill," cried Murden, after a hasty glance at his men, and finding that every robber was secured excepting the chief; "cripple that devil for me, and I am your debtor for life."

Gulpin was about forty rods from us, when the lieutenant spoke, and was running almost as rapidly as a kangaroo dog. In a few minutes he would have been beyond our reach, and recommenced his career of crime.

Under these circumstances, Fred felt that he owed a duty to the world. Hastily bringing his rifle to his shoulder, he glanced along its deadly tube and fired. For a few seconds we could not perceive that the shot had affected the bushranger, and I was about to try my skill, when the villain staggered and fell heavily to the earth.

His leg was broken near the knee, and the bone was terribly shattered by the rifle ball.

CHAPTER XIV.

Discovery of stolen Treasures in the Stockman's Cellar.

Lying upon the ground were the bushrangers, bruised, bloody, and dirty, groaning with disappointment and pain, and one or two of the most violent ones cursing so loudly that the air smelt sulphurous. Across the bodies of the fallen wretches were the policemen, with huge beads of perspiration standing on their brows, and faces red with the sudden and unusual exertion which they had endured to conquer the desperate robbers.

The poor fellow whom the leader of the robbers had injured by breaking a carbine over his head, was lying on the ground, bleeding profusely from a long gash in his skull. He was assisted into the hut, and left for a few minutes, until more pressing demands had been attended to; and after the prisoners were once again ironed, and chained to the cart, some one asked what had become of Bimbo; as that individual had not been seen since the commencement of the attack.

"I'll warrant the lazy rascal has gone to sleep somewhere, and not awakened during the disturbance," Murden said, not suspecting the trick which the stockman had played him.

"And what has become of my dog?" I asked, surprised to think that he had also disappeared.

Fearful that he had got tired of my society, and left for his mistress, I whistled shrilly, and was happy to hear a response, in the shape of a deep bay, back of the hut. We hurried where we could get a view of him, and, to my surprise and delight, I saw that he was standing over the prostrate body of the miserable, treacherous Bimbo, and showing a set of ivories at every movement of the wretch, which would have delighted a gentleman versed in dentistry, or an admirer of white teeth.

The lieutenant, Fred, and myself, proceeded to the spot, and as we approached, Bimbo attempted to rise, but the vigilant animal, with an angry growl, grasped him by the neck, and the dirty fellow was content to lie quiet, although he used his voice well, and broke forth with lamentations at the hound's rough treatment.

"Is this the kind of usage a cove meets for giving you something to eat, and looking after yer hanimals. Take the cuss off, can't ye, and not let him stand over me this way?"

"Call off the dog," whispered Murden; "I am afraid that the animal will choke him to death, and then, lazy as he is, he still would be a loss, for he gives me information at times concerning the movements of bushrangers, which I can obtain nowhere else."

"Did he ever give you tidings that led to the arrest of thieves?" I asked.

"No, I think not," replied the officer, after a moment's reflection; "but that, you know, is no fault of Bimbo's. By his advice, I have twice been near capturing parties of marauders. Something, however, has happened to prevent me — either I would get the intelligence too late, or the robbers had just changed their haunts."

"I see," replied Fred, with a grin; "the lazy, ignorant Bimbo has blinded the eyes of one of the smartest lieutenants of police in Australia, and by pretending to furnish information, has gained his confidence, simply to place him on the wrong track."

"What mean you?" asked Murden, astonished.

"I mean that this scamp" — and by this time we were beside the fellow, whose face bore every mark of the most abject terror — "has been in league with the bushrangers for years; that he just entered into a contract with Jim Gulpin, to set his gang free, and that he picked the pocket of Maurice to get the key of the robber's irons, and that our deaths were deliberately planned, and would have been carried into effect, had we not chanced to overhear the bargain."

"So help me God, lieutenant, it's a lie!" shouted Bimbo, struggling to his feet, a proceeding which the hound did not exactly like, and he looked into my face as much as to ask whether it was all right, and manifested hostility even when I called him away.

"You knows very well, lieutenant, that I've been the best spy on this route for years, and that I always tells you all that happens, and now to think that these strangers should come here, and try and take my character away, it's too bad, it is," and the dirty scamp dug his filthy fingers into his eyes, and tried to force a tear, but the effort was a failure.

"How about the stolen articles in the cellar of the hut, a portion of which you were to receive for setting the gang free?" asked Fred.

"There's none there," whined the fellow, "so help me God, there's none there, and there's no use in searching."

"Well, examine the hut at all events," replied Fred; and bidding Bimbo walk to the house, we followed close at his heels, and threatened him with the fangs of the dog when he hesitated.

By the time we had reached the station hut, the policemen were just depositing Gulpin near the door, having brought him in a blanket from the spot where he fell. The wretch was suffering great pain, and huge beads of perspiration were streaming down his forehead from its effects. The men had stripped off the leg of his trousers, and revealed bones protruding near the knee. But little blood flowed from the wound where the ball had penetrated, and I considered it, with my imperfect knowledge of surgery, as looking decidedly bad for saving the robber chief's life.

I stooped down, and sought to examine the limb, but with horrid imprecations, the bushranger ordered me off, and swore that no one but a regular physician should attend him.

As we were over a hundred miles from Melbourne, and there was not a doctor, probably, between us and that city, I gave the man up for lost, and so I told the lieutenant, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and declared that there would be one the less to hang, and that it was always bad travelling with wounded men in company.

"Let that man be kept within musket shot," said Murden, pointing to the guilty Bimbo, who was still snivelling, and endeavoring to excite our sympathies.

"And what shall we do with this poor wretch?" Fred asked, gazing with pity at the prostrate form of the robber chief, who, an hour before, was a model of health and strength.

"What can we do?" asked the officer, with a puzzled expression.

"I am no surgeon," replied Fred, "but I will, if the poor wretch is willing, attempt to amputate the limb, and it may be the means of saving his life."

"Save it for a halter, hey?" asked Gulpin, opening his eyes; and for a moment they were lighted up with a fierce fire, that showed the bitter hatred which the man entertained against his captors.

"That is not for me to judge," replied Fred; "I offer to save your life, if possible, and you must depend upon the courts of Melbourne whether it is continued."

The outlaw shook his head, and after wetting his parched lips with water exclaimed, —

"I would rather die as I am; no surgeon's knife shall hack my flesh while living, and I'm too far from the big town to think they will string my bones on wires after death. I shall live; and if the bushrangers in these parts get the alarm, I may defy you yet! See, I grow stronger, and my leg no longer troubles me with a racking pain."

In his desperation, the outlaw struggled to sit upright, and smiled a ghastly smile, at his supposed triumph over death.

"Foolish man," I replied, "the cessation of your pains is a sure harbinger of death. Already has mortification set in, and the best surgeon in the world cannot save you."

"Is it so?" he asked, hoarsely, after a sharp glance at my face to see if he could not read trickery, and an attempt to deceive him.

"Upon my word as a man, you are dying," I replied.

"Well, death and me has met many times, and why should we fear each other? Let him come; he will not find me unprepared."

"But your peace with God?" I asked, earnestly.

"Look you, young man," the outlaw said, "for ten years I've led a life of crime; I've committed murders, and robbed all who crossed my path, and laughed at the agony of those I have rendered penniless. Do you think that God is willing to pardon sins on such short notice?"

"There is hope for all," I replied.

"You may think so, but I don't believe in that kind of mummery. Go away from me, and let me die in peace."

"But, consider," I urged.

He waved his hand impatiently, as though the conversation wearied him, and he wished to terminate it without farther discussion. I joined Murden, who was standing a short distance from the dying man, calmly smoking his pipe, and apparently indifferent to the remarks which his prisoner made.

"Has he been grumbling?" asked Murden.

"No, he appears to be rejoiced to think that he will cheat the courts of Melbourne of a victim, and declares that if a man is accused of being a bushranger, his death is sealed, whether innocent or guilty."

"There is much truth in what he says," replied the officer, after a moment's thought; "the judges act upon the principle that it is better ten innocent persons should die, than one robber escape. They do not prove a man guilty, but require him to prove that he is innocent; hence the burden of proof rests upon the defendant, and he has no means of establishing, unless possessed of unbounded wealth, the fallacy of such reasoning."

"And the people of Australia call that law?" I asked, indignantly.

"That is law, and very good law, too," replied Murden; "you can hardly wonder at such a state of things, when you take into consideration the lawlessness of the bands swarming over these vast plains, and attacking every party weaker than themselves."

Murden walked towards the hut as though he declined to converse any further on the subject; but just then his eyes fell on Bimbo, who was seated under the shed, within sight of the sentry, and the idea occurred to make search on the premises for the goods which we had overheard him talk about.

"Ho, Bimbo," he said, "show us where the stolen property is kept, and perhaps I may interfere to save your life."

"So help me, God, lieutenant, I don't know what you mean. I never stole a single thing in my life."

"Then how came you to be sent to Australia for ten years?" asked the officer, with a sneer.

"Because I was unjustly suspected, as I am now. A man swore that I broke into a store when he knew I was nowhere near the building."

"It won't do, Bimbo," replied the officer, sending the fellow back to his place. "Remember, I have offered you a fair chance to act as a government witness, but you decline."

I thought the fellow had half a mind to confess, but he apparently considered the offer, and resolved to brave it out.

"Bring me a couple of hatchets," Murden said to his men; and when they were brought he led the way to the hut, and began splitting the boards of the floor and removing them; but no signs of a cellar were discovered, and I began to think that the conversation must have reference to some other stock-house, when one of the men uttered an exclamation of surprise, and tearing up a board that was placed against the wall, we saw a large hole, which, instead of being directly under the floor, extended beyond the sides of the hut, and formed a sort of magazine that could only be discovered by removing, as we had done, all the planks and timbers.

"Jump down, one of you," said Murden, addressing his men.

An exclamation of surprise was uttered by the man that descended.

"Here's a large room," he shouted, "and nearly full of different articles."

"Go and slip a pair of irons on Bimbo," Murden said, turning to Maurice, "and chain him to the cart with the rest of the thieves."

A moment after we could hear the prayers of the fellow as he was led to the cart, and his entreaties to speak with the lieutenant just for a moment.

"He is too late," was all the remark that the officer vouchsafed upon being informed of Bimbo's desire.

We entered the secret cellar, and then had the articles which were found there passed up for an examination. Clothes, powder, and lead, liquors, boxes of pickles, preserved meats, China ginger, and other sweetmeats, and in fact it is hard to remember all the names of the different articles stored in that underground cell. The collection looked as though it had been plundered from various teams on their way to the mines, and such we afterwards found to be the case; as Bimbo confessed that he had acted in the capacity of storekeeper for three or four years, and even before the mines were discovered he was in league with bushrangers, and always gave them information when he knew a party of policemen were on their trail.

There was another piece of information which Bimbo gave us, more pleasing than any thing which he had said. By his directions, one of the men was set at work digging in the cellar, and after throwing up a few shovelfuls of earth, a canvas bag was reached, which proved to be remarkably heavy. The men crowded around, wild with excitement, when Murden loosened the string tied around its mouth, and we all gave a shout when particles of gold dust were discovered, and a louder cheer when the lieutenant emptied into a basin about forty pounds of gold of the first quality.

"This is a prize worth something," Murden said, overjoyed at his good fortune.

"The government will make its expenses on this trip," I remarked, as I calculated the worth of the gold.

"Do you suppose that government will ever see the color of this dust?" asked Murden, with a laugh.

I replied that I expected he would render an account of it to his superior officer.

"And let my superior officer retain the whole of that which we have worked hard for. I know a trick worth two of that. Stand by and let me divide it according to grade, men."

A pair of scales was produced in a twinkling from one of the saddle holsters of the men, and with great dignity the lieutenant weighed out the full amount, and then made a calculation.

"I am going to let these two gentlemen share equally with me. They deserve more, but according to the rules of the service, volunteers must rate with lieutenants."

Fred and I looked at each other in surprise, hardly believing our senses, while the men declared with one accord that it was but right we should receive our share, and that we were an honor to the police force.

"There's twenty-two hundred dollars to be divided among the men, and about two thousand dollars for us three," said Murden, after finishing his calculations.

"And do you expect us to take the money?" Fred asked.

"I certainly do," replied the lieutenant, with the most refreshing coolness.

"But suppose an inquiry should be made by those in authority at Melbourne, regarding the finding of this money? What answer should we return?"

"You can say that you should like to find more on the same terms, and refer inquirers to me for further particulars."

"But shall you say nothing about the discovery when you reach the city?" we asked.

"To be sure I shall. I intend to mention in my report that I found a large quantity of stolen goods, and present a schedule of the same."

"And the gold?" I asked.

"The gold! why, I have lived too long in Australia to think of giving up my lawful prize-money, and if I did I should be dismissed from the police force as not worthy of a command. Follow my example and pocket all that you can get, and say nothing to any one, or you will be laughed at for your weakness."

The argument of the officer was not convincing as far as the honesty of the transaction was concerned; but when I saw the men empty their share of the dust into pouches which they wore around their necks, I confess the desire to do likewise was overpowering, and Fred and myself received our thirds of the gold, valued at two thousand dollars, without farther argument, or, indeed, caring particularly whether we were doing right or wrong.

CHAPTER XV.

Dying Confession of Jim Gulpin, the Robber.

"If you please, sir, Jim Gulpin is dying, I think, and wishes to speak to you," said one of the policemen, with a military salute.

I found Jim breathing with extreme difficulty, and already the moisture of death was on his brow. His eyes were set, and presented the peculiar appearance characteristic of a sudden demise.

A cloud of insects was hovering around the poor fellow's head, and many of them had alighted upon his face, and were sucking his blood as eagerly as though they knew they must improve their time. Gulpin was too weak, or else unconscious of their stings, to make an effort to drive them from their feast; and as for the police, they were too busy in dividing the gold found in the secret cellar to pay any attention to the dying robber.

I sent one of the men for a pail of fresh water from the spring near the house, and the only place where water could be had within a circle of twenty miles, and then with a wet towel I bathed the dying man's face, and wet his parched lips. He appeared revived, and grateful for the attention which I bestowed upon him, and murmured some words, the meaning of which I did not comprehend. I thought his mind wandered, and remained seated by his side, fanning his heated face, and listening to his respiration, which appeared to become more difficult at every breath.

All at once the robber chief roused himself from his lethargic state, and carefully scanned my face with his lack-lustre eyes. I met his gaze without flinching, and perhaps the bushranger read pity in my looks, for he merely uttered a sigh, and I heard him moan.

"Pardon me," he hoarsely whispered, extending his hand, "I have been harshly used during my life, and what I am the laws of England have made me. Once I was honest, and free from sin as a child, but an unjust accusation and an unjust conviction made me a bandit. The laws warred against me, and I turned on them and have vented my spite against not only those who framed the laws, but every body who lived under them."

He paused for a moment, and I again moistened his mouth with the wine and water. It revived him, and he continued, although in a subdued tone, —

"I will tell you why I feel this bitter hatred for my enemies, and then you can judge whether I am entirely in the wrong. Raise my head slightly, for I feel that I am sinking fast."

I propped his back against some spare blankets, and heard the bushranger's story. I thought he told me the truth at the time, and a few subsequent inquiries convinced me that such was the fact.

"I was born in the west of England," Gulpin began, "and although you may doubt my story when I tell you that my family is rich and honored, and the only blot upon the name was when I was accused of

crime, yet such is the fact. I am the youngest of three sons. My brothers are in the army, and hold commissions, and are no doubt, by this time, if alive, high in rank and power. My wish was to enter the army also, but my father thought he could not afford to purchase me a commission, and he had exhausted his favor with the ministry in providing for his eldest sons. Accordingly I was sent to a banking house in London, with which my father had correspondence, and was admitted as a clerk.

"I knew that the business was unsuited for one of my restless disposition, and I should have left and sought my fortune in other parts of the world without a parent's sanction, had I not been bound to my place with chains stronger than iron, and with all my firmness I could not break them."

The robber paused for a moment, and while I wiped the moisture from his brow I thought a tear fell upon the cloth. He soon recovered his voice, however, and continued: —

"Owing to the position in which my father moved in society, I was treated by my employers, the eminent bankers, B—— & Brothers, with considerable favor; and was often invited to the house of the senior member of the firm. Mr. B—— was a widower, but had an only child who presided over his palace, situated away from the noise and confusion of London, at the West End.

"Miss Julia B—— was just one year younger than myself; and both of us being motherless was in a measure the reason why we so soon became on intimate terms. I know not how it happened, but I had not seen the lady more than twice before I felt that if I could not possess her, I did not care to live. Her father, who was subject to attacks of the gout, which frequently confined him to the house for weeks, often desired my presence to receive his instructions, and I never left his apartment without trying to see the object of my passion.

"You smile," the robber continued, as he caught my glance at his bearded face, blackened skin, and hard hands. "I was not always as I am now, and once would hardly let the sun touch my cheek, for fear it should mar its whiteness. Many years have passed since then."

The bushranger paused and remained silent for such a length of time that I feared his spirit was passing away; but after a while he rallied, and continued: —

"I will not tell how I contrived, by one pretext and another, to get speech with Julia, and how rejoiced I felt to see that my arrival was hailed with real satisfaction by the fair girl; nor need I tell how we had stolen interviews, and exchanged vows, and swore to be true to each other, until one day we were surprised by Mr. B——, who, pale with rage and indignation, ordered me from the house, and his daughter to her room.

"I left his presence without a word, and for two days I did not go near the banking house; but when I did, I was ordered to the presence of the man who of all others I dreaded most to see.

"For three years I have roamed the plains of Australia, and dared death in a hundred different ways, but I never felt so timid as when I was called before that weak, old man, whom I could have struck sense-

less with a blow, and crushed as easily as I and my gang have crushed an escort with gold dust under their charge.

"I was received with a lowering brow, and an expression that boded me no good, and I nerved myself for harsh words and reproaches, determined, let him say what he pleased, I would not lose my temper.

"'I need not refer,' Mr. B—— said, 'to the base ingratitude of which you have been guilty in seeking to compromise my daughter's honor and happiness. I do not wish to upbraid you; and to give you an opportunity of showing that I can forgive an indiscretion, I offer you an honorable position in our house at St. Domingo; the junior manager has vacated his situation, and we have concluded to give the berth to you, knowing that a few months will cure you of the foolish passion which you now profess, and that a few years' time will place you at the head of the house, and at your disposal a handsome fortune.'

"'Then there is no hope of my seeing Miss Julia once more?' I faltered.

"'Foolish boy, read that article and see,' the banker said, tossing a copy of the Times towards me.

"I read, and my brain grew wild while I read. I felt the hot blood tingling in every vein, and boiling as though it would burst its bounds, and all the time that the paper was trembling in my hands — they shook as though I was under a fit of ague — I knew that the banker was scrutinizing every gesture with his calm, cold eyes, calculating the effect which it would have upon my love.

"'You do not read,' he said, at length, reaching out his hand to take the paper.

"He spoke the truth, for, although I had glanced over the Times, I did not exactly comprehend the meaning, and I was staring at the banker, with his cold eyes, as though I read in them triumph at my confusion.

"I mechanically handed him the paper, when he adjusted his spectacles with his usual precision, and in a calm voice read, —

"'We understand that the Hon. Fitzroy Summerset Howard, second son of the Earl of Paisley, is soon to be united in marriage with the only child of the rich banker, Mr. B——. A fortune of one hundred thousand pounds is to be her dowry.'

"'That latter clause is the bait that attracted you, no doubt,' the banker said, with a sneer; 'but luckily your project is defeated.'

"'I solemnly swear,' I exclaimed, with sudden energy, 'that I love Miss Julia dearly — better than all the world, and that if you will allow me two years' time to win her, you may keep your fortune, and bestow it upon whom you please.'

"'Pshaw!' he said, with an expression of contempt; 'I but waste words with you. In one week my daughter weds, and to benefit you, and rid her of an annoyance, I have offered you a position at St. Domingo; will you accept it or not?'

"'And fall a victim to the yellow fever in a month after my arrival,' I said, with a taunting smile, for I felt the devil rising within me, and I did not care to suppress it.

"'Perhaps,' was the laconic answer; and the cold eyes gleamed like those of a basilisk.

"'Then hear me, and know that I too have firmness. Your daughter and myself have pledged our mutual faith — we have exchanged vows which soar above your money bags, and as long as I possess my reason, my liberty, and health, so long will I endeavor to see the lady and hold her to her word.'

"I turned to leave the room, but the banker recalled me with a word.

"'Is that your firm resolution?' he asked, with as much unconcern as he could assume.

"'It is,' I answered.

"'Then I must try other means,' he said; and as he spoke, he touched a bell.

"A door leading to the outer office was instantly opened, and a clerk made his appearance.

"'Is the officer still in attendance?' asked Mr. B——.

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Let him enter.'

"I did not suspect any thing unusual, and was about to pass out of the room, when I found myself in the embrace of a police officer, and before my surprise was over, a pair of handcuffs was slipped over my wrists, and I was a prisoner.

"'What is the meaning of this, sir?' I demanded, indignantly.

"'Be quiet,' the man said; 'it's only for a bit of forgery.'

"'Forgery!' I gasped, astonished beyond belief.

"'Take him away, officer,' the banker said; 'he has confessed every thing to me, and made restitution of a portion of the money, but an example must be made. Forgery is too common, nowadays, to go unpunished.'

"The police officer almost carried me from the room, I was so overpowered by the unexpected, cruel, and unjust accusation; and as I staggered from the banker's presence, I saw the smile which I had remarked more than once upon his features during our interview, change to one of satisfaction, as though he now saw his way clear, regarding his daughter's marriage."

The outlaw paused for a few minutes, closed his eyes, and breathed hard, as though trying to suppress his emotion; but in spite of his firmness, I saw tears trickle down his haggard cheeks, as though the revival of his ill usage was too much for even his rugged nature to bear. At length, he opened his shirt collar, and exposed a gold cross, of rare workmanship, upon his bosom, and confined around his neck by a gold chain.

"This cross," he said, raising it to his lips, "was presented to me by the only woman I ever loved. I need not tell you that her name was Julia, and that through all the changes which I have passed, I have retained possession of it. See, I press my lips to it, and solemnly swear that I never committed forgery in my life, and that I was innocent of crime until after I was transported. I have but a short time to live, and do you think I would commit perjury upon the brink of the grave? Do you believe me?" he asked, earnestly.

"Most sincerely I do," I answered, for I saw that the dying bushranger was in earnest.

"Then I am satisfied that I can trust you, and will continue my story. I was taken to prison, and confined in a dungeon, as a forger. I asked the amount of money which I stood charged with obtaining, and the turnkey laughed in my face, and told me that I ought to know better than he the sum of my villany.

"By a liberal expenditure of my scanty funds, I was enabled to send a letter to my father, informing him of the circumstances of my arrest, and vowing my innocence. I received a reply, that I had disgraced his name, and that he never desired to see me again.

"I sank under the blow, and for hours I lay senseless; but at length I rallied, when a letter was placed in my hands. It was in the handwriting of Julia, and with eager haste I broke the seal, and scanned its contents. It was but another species of torture, but more pointed than the accusation of crime.

"Her letter was worded coldly, and contained expressions which I little thought she would ever use to me. She believed me guilty of the crime with which I stood charged, considered that I had taken an unfair advantage of her father's kindness, and concluded with a hope, that if I lived to serve out my sentence, I would always remain in exile, and never distress my family with my presence.

"Twice did I read that short, heartless letter, before I fully comprehended its meaning; and when I realized that I was discarded, believed guilty, I sat down, and bowed my head upon my breast, and shed tears of agony. I cared no longer to live, and almost wished that forgery was, as formerly, punished with death.

"During my grief, I was summoned to the court, placed in the prisoners' dock, and heard, for the first time, that I was charged with forging Mr. B——'s name to a draft for a thousand pounds, and that I had confessed the crime, and made restitution of most of the money which I had obtained, and that on that account I was entitled to mercy, and that the liberal, patriotic banker would have spared me, if he had thought I would have sinned no more.

"I was like one in a dream all the time that I was in the court room. I was asked by the judge, in a severe tone of voice, if I wished counsel, and mechanically I answered in the affirmative; and after I had consulted a moment with him, I recollected no more, until I was led from the room, and told that I was transported for ten years.

"The next day I was sent to Liverpool, in company with housebreakers, thieves, and men accused of all crimes, and from thence I was taken on board of a ship loaded with felons, and bound for Australia. Even after I was safely chained between the decks of the vessel, I did not escape the vengeance of the man whose daughter I had dared to love. A newspaper was thrust into my hand by some person, who directed me to read, and then disappeared. My worst fears were realized — Julia had become the wife of the earl's son on the same day that I was condemned.

"I tore the paper into ten thousand pieces, and then vowed, that as I was with criminals, and classed as such, I would show a felon's spirit. I no longer was meek and dejected. I became a leader, and planned for the capture of the ship, and should have succeeded, had not a treacherous hound betrayed us to punishment.

"But I was not discouraged by my failure, and when I was beaten for my rebellious spirit, I had satisfaction, for one dark night I drove a knife to the captain's heart, and laughed to think I remained undetected.

"You shudder," the robber said, when he saw that I shrank from his side at this avowal. "I grant that the deed was wicked and cruel; but I had been trampled upon as a man, betrayed and condemned, and my feelings underwent such a change that I was no longer human.

"After a long and dreary passage, the ship arrived at Hobson's Bay, and we were landed. My reputation was too bad to be allowed to serve outside of the hulks, and accordingly, day after day, I dragged my chain and ball, attached to my right foot, after me, and performed labor that caused many of my fellow-prisoners to sink by my side and expire, while others would fall to the ground, and be lashed by the whips of our taskmasters into renewed activity.

"One hope alone kept me alive — the expectation of an escape. I planned, and sought to carry them out, but the vigilance of my keepers frustrated my intentions, and it was not until the gold mines were discovered that I found an opportunity. Many of our overseers then left the employ of government, and flocked to the mines. Of course, more men were engaged, but they were too green in the service to understand all of the tricks which prisoners resorted to to blind their eyes.

"One dark night, a convict about my own age, and myself, resolved to make an attempt at escape. Our chains were filed off, and knives placed in our hands by men outside of the prison walls; these we had kept secreted for many weeks, in hope of finding a use for them, and when we heard the rain dash against the roof, we resolved that the hour had arrived for an attempt for freedom.

"Most of the sentries were under shelter, when we crossed the court yard, with steps like those of a cat, and stood before the astonished turnkey, who kept watch upon the inner gate. Before he had time to raise an alarm, we struck, and he fell without a groan. We hastily tore the clothes from his body, and I dressed myself in them, casting away the prison suit which I wore, and then with the key of the massive gate, I unlocked it, and continued on to the outer lodge, where I knew we should meet with another keeper.

"The latter was busily engaged in writing when we entered, and did not notice but that we were servants of the prison. He never probably knew what killed him, for he fell ——"

"Good God!" I exclaimed with horror, "did you assassinate him, also?"

"How could we have escaped unless we did? By the keeper's side was a bell rope, a touch of which would have brought a dozen soldiers upon us, and then death would have been certain. We had been prisoners too long to scruple at murder when our safety was involved.

"My fellow convict removed the man's clothes, even before the breath had left his body; and while he was dressing himself, I glanced my eye over the letter which the keeper had been writing. I saw, to my astonishment, that it was addressed to Mr. B——, the banker, and that an account of my health, my work, and rebellious disposition, were set forth, and a hope was manifested that I should break down under the

severe discipline of the hulks, and that if I did not, other employment would be found in a few weeks, which would surely end my days. A donation of twenty-five pounds was acknowledged, and thanks were returned for the same.

"I ground my teeth with rage, and then added a line in the letter, to let the villain know that I still lived, and hoped to get square with him before I died.

"Time was too precious, however, to waste it there. Every moment was worth an hour to us, for we were liable to be interrupted; and if seen at large the whole city would have been aroused, and capture inevitable.

"The huge key that unlocked the outer gate was hanging on its accustomed peg, and to take possession of it, and emerge into the street, was but a moment's work; and then to give our oppressors all the trouble possible, we locked the gate, and hurled the key into the river, which ran hard by.

"The night was pitch dark, and, as I said before, the rain poured down in torrents, for winter had set in with uncommon severity. The streets were without light, and the gutters were like small rivers; but by the latter we were enabled to find our way. You are aware that Melbourne is partly built on a hill, so by following the course of the water, as it rushed towards the bay, we gained the outskirts of the city, and struck across the broad fields, and toiled on through the long night, and when daylight came, no sign of house or inhabitants was to be seen.

"That day we rested for a few hours, and continued our journey towards night, hardly knowing where we were wandering to, almost famished with hunger, and dead with fatigue.

"I have not breath to tell you all that we suffered while getting towards the bushranging haunts; our days of hunger and wretchedness — our adventures with the natives, and their attempts to kill us — the desperate risks which we ran of being captured and taken back to prison — and last of all, our reaching this hut, which is to be the scene of my death.

"Here is where I first met Bimbo; and as he is already a prisoner, there can be no harm in my telling you that he provided for our wants, kept us in his secret cellar over a week, until we were fully recruited, and able to grasp a musket, and then introduced us to Black Darnley, as possessing spirit enough to belong to even his gang.

"By him we were accepted; but after I had served in the ranks a short time, I raised a band of my own, and have pillaged and murdered to my heart's content."

The robber ceased speaking, and a spasm passed through his frame, that I thought would result fatally; but a drink of wine restored him, and he again spoke, but in a voice not above a whisper.

"I have a commission which I wish you to take care of," the bushranger said, scanning my face to see what effect his words would have upon me; "can I trust you to take charge of it?"

I promised faithfully to fulfil his wishes, no matter what he required of me.

"This cross," he said, touching it to his lips, and uttering a sigh as

he did so, that came from the heart, "I promised to send to Julia, only when death overpowered me. Will you take it to her, and say that the wearer has gone to another world, where treachery and crime do not exist, and where I hope to meet her and her father, and then disprove the unjust accusation that was brought against me?"

I promised to obey his wishes, and a look of gratitude stole over his dark face.

"My name," he whispered, "is engraved upon the jewel; do not give it to the world, but know me as Jim Gulpin, the robber. I do not wish to disgrace my father's name, even if I have been unjustly accused by him."

I also promised compliance with this request, and asked if there was any other matter which he wished to confide to me.

"You know where the hut of Darnley stood in the black woods which you visited?" the robber whispered, with a painful effort.

I replied in the affirmative.

"Near the hut I buried all my ill-gotten gains, and there they remain yet; to you I bequeath them, to do as you see fit. There are thousands of pounds' worth of gold dust there, besides jewels of value. After searching the hut, walk in a south——"

The robber's voice failed him; he made painful efforts to recover his breath, and during the struggle his eyes rolled fearfully in their sockets, and his hands clutched the earth convulsively. I feared that he would die without revealing the hiding-place of his hoard, and impressed with this idea, I dashed a pot of cold water in his face, and poured more wine down his throat.

"Thanks," he gasped, "I'm — going — farewell — ten paces — in a south——"

There was a gurgle in the bushranger's throat, a convulsive movement of his limbs, and then all was quiet, and the spirit of the outlaw chief had taken flight to a better world.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Forced March towards Melbourne.

I removed the cross from the neck of the dead robber, placed it around my own, and reported his death to Murden.

"Dead, is he?" repeated the officer, carelessly; "did he make any confession?"

"He spoke about an unjust sentence," I replied, "that is all of any importance, excepting a history which he confided to me; it would be uninteresting to you, however."

"Ah, I dare say," answered Murden, languidly; "but to tell you the truth, the man always passed for a person of good birth, even at the hulks; and there was some romance connected with his sentence, but

what it was, I have forgotten. Old Pete, however, the same whom Gulpin murdered when he made his escape, used to receive money from some source or other, for keeping them posted concerning his health and habits, but the old fellow was a sly dog, and never divulged secrets."

"If a portion of his story is correct, why not the whole?" I asked myself, as I thought of the hidden treasure, buried somewhere in the vicinity of the last resting place of Darnley.

The more I pondered over the subject, the more firmly I became convinced that Gulpin meant honestly by me, when he said that thousands of dollars' worth of gold dust, taken from people returning from the mines, was deposited in the earth for safe keeping, and perhaps with a hope that some day it might be removed, when its owner was ready to flee the country.

Resolving to consult with Fred, as soon as I could do so without exciting suspicion, I left the lieutenant and Fred talking together, while I went in search of a proper place to bury the dead bushranger.

I had been employed but a few minutes, when Smith joined me, and in spite of my remonstrance, relieved me of the work which I was performing.

I did not think it necessary to tell him, at that time, of the confession of Gulpin, although I knew very well that his assistance would be necessary when we commenced our search for the gold.

In spite of the intense heat, Smith soon had a grave large enough to admit the body of the bushranger, and then we returned to the hut, and got Murden to allow three or four of his men to carry the body to the spot.

Fred, Smith, and myself followed the procession, and consigned the body to the earth, without a word being spoken. It was a solemn moment, and as I heard the dirt fall upon the corpse, my thoughts wandered to the proud lady, and the stern father through whose instrumentality the lover and son became a leader of bandits, and died a violent death, while setting at defiance the laws of his country.

Fred and myself lingered behind, and suffered the rest of the party to reach the hut in advance of us; and while we sauntered leisurely along, I confided to him the confession of Gulpin, and asked his opinion regarding the means to be employed to discover the dust.

"I think the man was honest," Fred said, after a pause, "when he made the confession; in fact, the gang must have gold dust buried somewhere, for it is notorious that two escorts have been plundered by bushrangers within three months. The robbers have not been able to go into town to squander their money; they buy nothing, because they take every thing by force, and therefore it is very evident to me that the treasure which they have stolen must be in the ground; but the question is, to find the spot."

I repeated the last words the robber had uttered,—

"Ten paces in a south ——"

"He may have meant south-east, south-west, or even south; there are a dozen points of the compass governed by south, and the only way we can solve the mystery is to visit the spot, and trust to our tact in finding earth recently disturbed. If there is money within the radius

of ten paces from that hut, we'll find it, unless some one gets there before us."

"And Smith," I asked, "we shall want his services."

"Of course, and a better man we could not have to accompany us. His team will not only carry all the tools that we shall need to work with, but provisions sufficient to last us a month, if we think it will pay to spend that length of time in the search. We must have Smith as a companion, by all means."

"Let us promise him a share, if successful, and if we fail, nothing," I said; "he is too stout a friend to be offended, and his knowledge of the country can be turned to a profitable account."

"We must hurry Murden," Fred remarked, "and get him to use more expedition, or we shall not reach the city for a week. Time is precious to us, until we find the buried treasure."

"But, remember," I whispered, as Murden came out of the hut to meet us, "do not lisp a word of this to him."

"You appear earnest, gentlemen," said Murden, as he joined us; "pray, what perplexes your minds now?"

"We were conversing on the subject of making a forced march to Melbourne," Fred replied, gravely.

"And why need that trouble you?" the officer inquired.

"It does not trouble us much, but we were discussing the probability of losing our prisoners before reaching the city, in case the various bands of bushrangers in this part of the country should concentrate their forces, and make a sudden onslaught. We do not number many fighting men, for remember that Haskill's skull is cracked, and he can do nothing but hold it with both hands and groan. The man is threatened with a brain fever, and should be in a hospital, instead of on the plains."

Murden cast his eye over his men, who were cooking their suppers, it being near sundown, and was apparently debating in his mind the force of our words. He knew that we were no cowards, for we had given him proof of our fighting qualities; and not understanding the secret motive which actuated us in pressing for a speedy march to Melbourne, began to think that there might possibly be reason in what we said.

"I hardly think the robbers would dare to attack us," Murden said, at length; "the scamps know that my bullies can fight when roused."

"But you do not look at things in their true light," Fred said. "Your present expedition is the first one that has ever been able to cope with the lawless scoundrels; and you can readily comprehend how the bushrangers will feel when they know that two of their most formidable bands have been broken up, and by only a dozen men. In Melbourne, one dauntless escaped convict is considered more than a match for four policemen, because the former fights with a halter around his neck, and unless he conquers, death is certain. Be assured that the gangs in the vicinity understand the advantage of having a terrible name, and that before we reach the city they will seek to retrieve it. I should not be surprised if even now our trail was followed, and runners sent from one haunt to another, for the purpose of arousing the devils to fall upon us, and take vengeance."

"If I thought so," muttered the lieutenant, glancing along the trail

which we had made on the broad plain, as though he already saw squads of enemies in the distance.

"We cannot, of course, be certain that we are followed, but I think that it is better to be over-cautious than neglectful. One hundred pounds on each prisoner delivered to the government, is a sum of money that should not be thrown rashly away."

"By St. George!" cried the Englishman, with warmth, "that last argument decides me. I don't fear a battle with bushrangers, but I should dislike to lose my prize-money. Hurry through your suppers, men, and bring up the animals. In fifteen minutes we start, and there will be no rest until we reach Boomerang River."

"Come and share my supper — there's not much of a variety, but what there is you are welcome to," Murden said, turning to us, after he had given his order.

"You did well," whispered Fred, as we followed the officer to the hut; "don't let him grow cold."

"We've said enough for once; let him allude to the subject the next time, or he will suspect," Fred rejoined, in the same low tone; and without renewing the conversation, we sat down upon the floor of the hut, and ate our beefsteak, broiled upon coals, and drank our strong coffee, with a peculiar relish.

There was no allusion to the dead robber we had just buried, and, in fact, Murden already appeared to have forgotten that there ever existed such a person. But if his memory was so defective, mine was not, and I could hear the last words of the bushranger ringing in my ears, as he gasped for breath, and exclaimed, "Ten paces in the south——"

The gold cross, too, which I had taken from the dead man's neck, seemed to sear my bosom, and parch the skin, so heated did I fancy it grew when my thoughts wandered to the dying man and his buried treasure.

"What are we to do with these goods, which make such a display?" I asked of Murden, glancing around at the miscellaneous collection which surrounded us.

"Return all but the wine and provisions to the hole from whence they came, and let government send after them," answered Murden.

"And the wine?" I asked.

"We'll take it with us, and drink it on our way to the city. We shall, by that means, prevent some other party from being led into temptation."

Many hands made light work of returning the goods to the secret cell, as there was not much formality in stowing them, and then the floor boards were replaced, and we were ready to start on our long journey.

"Are we all ready?" asked our commander.

"All ready, sir," was the answer, and a loud crack of Smith's whip, as he touched up one of the leading oxen, which appeared too eager to start before the word was given, made us think of the time when we first left Melbourne under his guidance.

"Then forward we go!" cried Murden; and we had got some paces from the hut, when a shrill voice exclaimed,—

"O, don't leave me — go to thunder — who cares for bushrangers? Bimbo — Bimbo — where's Bimbo?"

"I had forgotten the parrot; what shall we do with him?" asked Murden, ordering a halt.

"Let me stop and look after him until you come back again," cried the innocent Bimbo, raising his dirty face from the team, and gazing at us with an air of simplicity charming to behold.

"Silence, you miserable traitor!" shouted the exasperated officer, "or I shall be tempted to beat you with my whip."

"I don't see what this cove has done, that he should be snatched up and lugged off this way. P'aps Mr. Sherman, who owns this stock-house, won't scold when he comes to hear of it. He won't say nothing, and swear to think that his cattle is all running wild, 'cos nobody takes care of 'um."

"Lend me your whip, Smith," Murden said, as the fellow raised his voice in a sort of howl, at the thought of being carried away from the hut which had sheltered and screened his rascalities for so many years.

Smith handed the short-handled instrument of torture to the officer, who waved it over his head with a scientific flourish, like one accustomed to its use, and in another instant Bimbo would have had something to cry for, but the cunning rogue ducked his head just in time to escape punishment. The long lash passed over his body, and cracked like the report of a pistol; and while the officer was drawing back his arm for another attempt, the impudent, dirty face of the rogue was raised, and a leer of contemptuous pity expressed upon it.

Neither Fred nor myself could prevent laughing at the fellow's coolness, and our mirth extended to Murden, who began to be aware that he was making a ridiculous exhibition of his temper, and tossed the stockman's whip to the owner, exclaiming, —

"I was foolish to allow the fellow to provoke me, and am glad that I did not touch him with the lash; although if he had not been as quick as lightning, I'd have taken a good piece of his hide."

"But what are we to do with the parrot? Remember we are losing time," I said.

"Yes, what's to be done with me — where's Bimbo?" shrieked the bird.

"Put the cage into the cart — he will excite curiosity when we reach Melbourne, and perhaps bring a round sum."

The order was obeyed, and with shrill screams of delight the bird and his cage were stowed among the prisoners, and long after dark we could hear the talkative parrot ask the bushrangers how they felt, and when they were going to die? Questions of great significance to them at the time. After a while he dozed off to sleep, but during the night awoke about once every half hour, and with a shout of, —

"Where's Bimbo — darn Bimbo — lazy Bimbo!" and then would drop off to sleep again.

At about nine o'clock we reached "Boomerang stream," the same place where we had witnessed the natives of Australia gorge themselves with kangaroo meat until stuffed to repletion. The place was alive with oxen and stockmen, and carts filled with stores on their way to the mines. Many of the drivers had just arrived, having been on the road from Melbourne all night, and were turning their cattle loose, intending to pass the day by the side of the stream, for the purpose of recruiting, and avoiding the heat of the noonday sun.

We forded the river, the waters of which were not more than twelve inches deep, and with many flourishes of his immense whip, Smith drew up his cattle directly under the shade of a friendly tree growing near the bank.

Before the cattle were turned loose, we were surrounded by anxious inquirers desirous of asking a dozen questions regarding the safety of the country, and what the men whom we had ironed had been guilty of.

Murden, who was both cross and hungry by his night's ride, attempted to satisfy their curiosity by replying; but he might just as well have attempted to dam a river with a sieve; and the few words which he spoke were almost lost in the confusion.

"We shall never get any breakfast or rest at this rate," he whispered to Fred and me, "so lend us a hand to clear the ground, and then I'll keep them at a distance, or break their necks."

We mounted our horses, and telling the stockmen, miners, adventurers like ourselves, speculators, and two or three fat old fellows, who were visiting their cattle-raising districts to see how their stock thrived, that we feared some of them were in league with bushrangers, and that we would have no one that did not belong to our force inside of the lines at present, drove them back until we had cleared a sufficient space for our convenience, and then the men stretched a rope from two posts, and inside of that barrier no one dared to venture without permission.

"Hullo, you feller with the blue flannel shirt," cried one of the rough-looking outsiders, addressing Fred, "did you do any thing towards grabbing them ere chaps?" alluding to our prisoners.

"Them ere two fellers is hextry policemen, I suppose," cried a newly arrived cockney, with great staring eyes, watching our movements as eagerly as though we were wild animals confined for his especial amusement.

"I wonder if the stealings are good in that department?" asked another.

"Do you hear, Murden?" Fred inquired, with a laugh, and a thought how appropriate the question was under the circumstances.

"Curse the fellow's impudence," muttered the lieutenant; "but I'll learn him a lesson that he'll remember for a few days," he continued; and then turning to Maurice who was unsaddling his horse, he said,—

"Take a man with you and arrest that blackguard. I suspect him to be a bushranger in disguise."

The policeman abandoned his horse on the instant, grasped his carbine, spoke a word to a companion, and before the inquisitive genius, who wished to know whether the stealings in the police force were good, had a chance to think of his unfortunate remark, he was in custody, and threatened with instant death if he even made a movement towards resistance. He was hustled before the commander of the corps, and with an indignant look and blustering voice, wanted to know for what he was seized.

"You think that I don't know you," said Murden, in a tone of pretended sternness, "but you are mistaken. You are Sam Firefly, the leader of a gang of bushrangers. I knew you the instant that I got sight of your face."

"So help me God, I'm not — I don't know the gentleman you speak

of. I'm a stranger here — I only arrived in Australia week before last; —for God's sake let me go, and I won't do any thing but what you wish me to;" and the fellow wrung his hands, and looked the very picture of woe and fright.

"I think I'd better order you to be shot, for if I should let you off, and find that you are Sam after all, I should always regret it," the lieutenant said, with mock gravity.

"Don't shoot me; please don't — I never hurt any one in my life. I'm only in the country to make my fortune, and when I get it I'll leave. I swear that I will."

"On those conditions, then, I will let you go — but remember, I shall have an eye on you hereafter."

The fellow expressed his thanks in a confused manner, and darted from the enclosure, and during the remainder of our stay at the stream we did not hear an impudent remark concerning our blue flannel shirts or the perquisites of Australian policemen. The heterogeneous mass were suddenly struck with Murden's display of authority, backed as it was by about a dozen men, well armed and ready to do his bidding without a question or murmur.

Fires were lighted and kettles soon boiling, and the smell of burning meat, as it crackled on the coals, made not only the hound but the weary guard look with eager eyes for the call to breakfast.

CHAPTER XVII

Triumphal Entry into Melbourne.

In spite of the intense heat and dust which greeted our arrival at "Boomerang stream," we managed to sleep for a few hours, and then, after a bath in the river, felt somewhat refreshed, and were anxious to proceed on our journey. The sun was too high, however, and the plains too heated to induce Murden to consent, so Fred and myself went on an excursion through the various camps near us, and after much hard work we were fortunate enough to get hold of a Boston paper, and then selecting the most secluded spot that we could find, and the freest from dust, we read to each other all the items of interest, and then commenced on the advertisements, which latter we finished just as Michael called us to supper.

Each party camped on the bank of the stream, had a fire burning, and the never-failing dish of coffee preparing for their evening meal. Parties of men were searching for their cattle, and driving them in, preparatory to a start; and a scene of confusion, it appeared to me, seemed inevitable; but to my surprise the oxen walked slowly towards the carts to which they belonged, and submitted to having yokes placed around their necks, without that resistance which I had anticipated.

The sun had hardly disappeared before the first cart started on its

long journey for Ballarat. Another and another followed, and in a short time we were the sole occupants of the camping ground.

In a few minutes after we had wished success to the last party that crossed the stream our horses were saddled, and once more we resumed our journey for Melbourne.

Nothing of general interest occupied our attention until we were within a few miles of the city, when Murden sent one of his men forward to announce his arrival to the captain of police, and to confide to him the success which had attended his enterprise.

Maurice, the person sent, must have imparted the news to a dozen friends, and they, probably, in turn told it to every one they met, for just as we came in sight of the city, we were surprised to witness a vast concourse of people on the road.

Some were on foot, and some on horseback, and every description of vehicle in Melbourne appeared to have been pressed into speedy service, and loaded down with men and women, anxious to get a glimpse of the ferocious bushrangers, whose names had long been such a terror to all having business beyond the limits of the city.

"We are in for it," said Murden, pointing towards the fast approaching crowd. "Close up on each side of the cart, men, and let no one speak to, or insult our prisoners!"

Before the crowd reached us, Smith deserted the side of his oxen for a moment, and laid his hand upon my horse's bridle, saying, —

"You remember where you and Mr. Fred slept the first night you landed in Melbourne?"

"To be sure I do," I replied; "in your house."

"And remember," he said, "I want you both to take up your quarters there again. You will promise me this?"

"I think that we had better go to some hotel," I replied, fearing that we should cause him trouble and expense.

"Don't think of such a thing; you will squander all of your money, and receive no equivalent for it. Go to my house, and we'll live like princes at a quarter the expense. Or, if you feel that you are too good for the company of a felon ——"

"Hold there, Smith," I said; "have we ever given you occasion to speak thus?"

"No; but you will be petted and praised, and I fear that perhaps so much attention will turn your hearts against me."

"Do not fear that," I rejoined, pressing his hand, which he returned, until I thought my fingers were in a vice; "we found in you a friend, and as such we shall continue to regard you until we leave the island."

"Then you will make my house your home?" Smith inquired.

"If you still insist, I answer that we had rather keep together, and be under your roof, than to be lodged in the proudest hotel in Melbourne."

Smith's broad, red face was actually radiant with happiness, as he fell back to his place; and as he had no other way of testifying his happiness, he began cracking his long heavy whip, which started the cattle into a trot, and shook up the bushrangers and the parrot so roughly, that the latter yelled out, —

"Hullo! what's the row? Where's Bimbo? Stop, will ye?" ques-

tions which were not answered, for just then our attention was attracted by a body of mounted men, dressed in the same kind of uniform as our companions, only their clothes did not look so soiled, and their arms were radiant with recent polishing.

At their head rode a fine-looking, stout, red-faced man, who weighed about two hundred pounds, and was a good specimen of a hale, hearty Englishman.

"Hullo, Murden," he said; "what have you been doing to thus set the city on fire? Is the news true, that you have had several engagements with Darnley and Gulpin's gangs, and came out best?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lieutenant, touching his cap with an air of respect; "I am happy to report that both Darnley and Gulpin are dead, and that their gangs are either killed or prisoners."

"Why, you have done yourself and the police force great credit, Murden, and I must talk with the lieutenant-governor about settling a pension on you. But how is this — do you let your prisoners go at large?" and the speaker pointed to Fred and myself with his riding whip.

"Your pardon, captain," replied Murden, "but those two gentlemen are Americans, and volunteers of my force, and without their aid I should have come back as wise as I went."

"Where did you pick them up?" I heard the police captain ask, in a half whisper, as he rode beside the lieutenant.

"Hush, sir," we understood Murden to reply; "they are easy to take offence, and are different from the majority of people who visit Australia in search of gold."

"Americans, did you say?" the captain repeated; and as he glanced at us from the corner of his eye, I heard him mutter, "They are not dressed exactly in dinner costume, but there's a plucky look about the fellows that I like, after all."

"I'm sure you'll like them, sir, after you've seen something of their Yankee shrewdness," replied Murden; "if we could only get them to accept of commissions in the police service, I'd pledge my pay for a year that we'd free this part of the country of bushrangers in less than six months."

"But won't they join?" inquired the captain, turning completely round in his saddle, where he was riding in advance of us, to get a look at our faces.

"I am afraid not," replied Murden; "they have got their American ideas of independence, and are as firm set in their notions as our countrymen."

"I'll have them yet," returned the captain. "I'll have them dressed up and presented to Latrobe; he is an old courtier, and can wheedle the devil with his tongue. When we reach the city, see that they are clothed in decent suits, and are provided for."

Fred, who was riding by my side, overheard the conversation as well as myself. We looked at each other and smiled, and thought how little the captain knew of the American character, if he thought we intended to depend upon the bounty of himself or the lieutenant for clothing while we possessed a dollar with which we could purchase for ourselves.

While the officers were conversing, the sergeants had formed their men in such a manner that the crowd, which began to press eagerly forward, was completely excluded from the cart, and could only get a sight at the prisoners through a broken rank, or by peeping between the horses' legs.

Our entrée into Melbourne was a perfect triumph; and to this day, I am uncertain which excited the most curiosity—the chained bushrangers, confined in the body of the cart, or Fred and myself, with our short beards and unshaven faces, ragged clothes, and deadly array of rifles, revolvers, and bowie knives.

The escort of policemen cleared the crowd, who stopped to gaze and ask questions, and as the former advanced with their heavy horses and drawn sabres, the latter receded to the right and left, leaving a space for the procession to pass.

Down through Collins Street we went, every window on the thoroughfare filled with eager faces anxious to get a sight of the novel procession, and I don't know how many times Fred and I were pointed at by women, who appeared to possess as much curiosity to see murderers as the sterner sex, and called us bushrangers and villains; and once we were hooted at by an excitable old lady, who did not for a long time discover her mistake; and Smith afterwards told us, in confidence, that he heard her muttering, that if we were not bushrangers, our countenances belied us shamefully, and she would not like to trust herself with us, after dark.

"Where do you intend to confine the prisoners, sir?" asked Murden of his captain.

"At the barracks; as I consider them safer than the jail at the present time," replied the captain of police.

"Why safer now than at any other time, sir?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Because, I do not know how many of the faces which I see around me may belong to men who have an interest in the escape of the bushrangers. Since you have been gone some strange things have come to light, and I am induced to believe that men living here under our protection, and trusted with our secrets, have been in league with the robbers of the plains for months. How have the bushrangers always known when an expedition was to be started for their extermination, and so faced it, or kept out of the way, according to the numbers we sent, unless word was carried by people who had our confidence? Be assured, Murden, that as patriotic and great as we may think ourselves, there are those in our midst, and, I believe, high in power, who do not scruple to accept of bribes, even if the gold which is offered is stained with blood."

I thought the lieutenant's cheeks blanched a shade paler than their wont, and I imagined, considering he had a few hundred pounds' worth of gold dust in his pockets, which formerly belonged to some honest man, that he would get confused, and confess to the secret hoard which we had discovered; but to my surprise he did no such thing, and returned an answer that elicited my unbounded admiration, it was so cool.

"We must ferret out the parties," he said, in reply to his superior,

"and make an example, and that will strike terror to the hearts of those disposed to accept bribes, hereafter."

"We will talk of this another time," replied the captain; "I feel now so rejoiced to think that we have secured a number of bushrangers, that I can hardly talk on any other subject. It was only last night Latrobe sent for me, and wanted to know why I had done nothing towards rendering a passage to the mines safe? The old fool! Why don't he send a company of his idle soldiers to scour the country, if he thinks it is so very easy to find those devils incarnate — the bushrangers?"

"Perhaps he keeps them in Melbourne because he has fears of his own safety," replied the lieutenant, laughing.

"Perhaps so; but I'd rather trust to my police force than all the soldiers in Australia. I suppose your two American friends will share in the reward which has been offered?"

"I hope so, for right well do they deserve it," replied Murden, heartily.

The multitude moved to and fro, and struggled to get glimpses of the bushrangers in the cart, and a number of times the police were obliged to strike those who pressed too near with the flat of their sabres, as a slight rebuke for their curiosity; but with all the struggling I heard no angry words pass, and for so large a crowd, it was the best natured one I ever saw.

We drew up before a substantial-looking building, with an open square in front, where a company of soldiers were parading.

A large gate was opened for our admission, and as soon as our party had entered, it was shut and bolted, and the crowd excluded, although many crawled upon the walls and sat there patiently, until the bushrangers were placed under lock and key, in a strong dungeon, where hardly a ray of light penetrated. A guard was stationed before the door with orders to allow no one to converse with those inside, and then, for the first time for many days, I and my friend found ourselves at liberty.

"Come," whispered Smith, "place your arms in the cart and we will go home. There is nothing further for us to do."

"Hullo," we heard Murden shout, "where are you going to?"

We waited for a moment, until he, in company with the captain, came within speaking distance, and then we replied, —

"We are going where we can get shelter and something to eat."

"Take them to the station, Murden, and let them stop there for the night, and see that they have something to eat. To-morrow we will see what we can do for them."

"We are able to take care of ourselves, sir," replied Fred, haughtily, "and do not need the charities of a station house. When we do we will let you know."

I saw the face of the captain turn a deep purple, as we continued our walk, and I was not surprised to hear him thunder out, —

"Stop, sir; I wish to speak further with you."

"Any communication that you may have to make, we shall be pleased to listen to, sir," I answered.

For the space of a minute the captain surveyed us from head to foot,

as though hardly knowing whether to be pleased or offended at our dignity; but at length he exclaimed,—

"Who, in the devil's name, are you?"

"We are happy to say that we are Americans," rejoined Fred, straightening his muscular form, and looking as proud of the title as a senator just elected to congress.

"Blast it, that is not what I mean. Are you born gentlemen?" pettishly exclaimed the captain.

"No one can be born gentle, but every man can be a gentleman if he but studies the courtesies of life," remarked Fred.

"And have you so studied?" asked the captain, with a smile.

"All Americans study," replied Fred, "though perhaps no two are alike. We try to be civil and attentive to all, and those qualities will pass for good breeding all the world over."

"By heavens, you are right," cried the captain, with genuine English bluffness, "and I should have known better than to have thought you would have accepted of a bed at the station house. Come with me, and make my house your home. I assure you both a welcome."

"You will excuse us, but we made an engagement before we entered the city to stop at Smith's house, and we told him to rely upon our word."

"And do you prefer his company to mine?" asked the captain, with astonishment.

"We are better acquainted with him," Fred said, evasively.

"But the man has been convicted as a felon and is only at liberty now on parole."

"He has atoned for his fault, and has shown himself a brave man," I replied.

"But with one word I can order him to prison again, and make him serve out his sentence."

"You would not think of doing such an unkind act, I know," rejoined Fred, with a smile.

"I don't know but I shall have to for no other reason than to get his company away," said the captain, smiling; "you will pardon me if I misjudged you both on account of your dress; we have many strangers landing at our port, and if they disguise themselves in the clothing of workmen, they must not feel slighted if they are taken for such."

"We are but workmen," I replied, "and to prove it, I will commence now. You have it in your power to help confer a benefit, and I mean to work until I get your consent to the scheme."

"Pray, what is it, sir? Any thing in my power I will do willingly."

"We wish the pardon of Smith, and your lieutenant will tell you that he richly deserves it for the gallantry and mercy which he has shown."

"Your request is one fraught with difficulty, but I will see the lieutenant-governor, Mr. Latrobe, and lay the subject before him. Perhaps you would like to speak to the gentleman himself on the matter."

"Perhaps it would be better if we did," replied Fred, with no expression of astonishment on his face at the proposal.

"Then I will get you an audience to-morrow afternoon, and mind, don't be afraid to speak to the governor when you see him."

"Have no fear on that point," I replied, with a smile.

"Then good-by until to-morrow; I'll send Murden for you when the governor is ready."

The captain so far forgot his aristocracy that he actually extended his hand at parting, and shook our fists with a right good will.

We joined Smith, who was standing a short distance from us, and had listened to every word that had been uttered with a face of scarlet, but as we turned away, I heard the captain remark,—

"Those are singular young fellows, and somehow I begin to like them."

"Well, Smith," I said, as he drove his team from the yard, "we are to have a hearing to-morrow, and perhaps in the evening may be able to celebrate your liberation."

"It will hardly be of use to me," he replied, bitterly. "Let a man do ever so well, the charge of once having been a convict will be repeated in his ears until he is no longer able to hear it. God knows I have repented of my crime, and only ask an opportunity to commence a new life; and I heard the very man who should have shielded me, say, 'he's only a convict,' and wonders that you dare trust your lives with me."

"He don't know you, Smith," replied Fred, consolingly. "Wait until he hears of your bravery, and knows what you have done, and then you'll see how quickly he will shake you by the hand, and congratulate you."

"Do you think so?" asked Smith, musing over Fred's words.

"I know it will be so; but be you ever so exalted or humble, Smith, there's no man on the island we would sooner call friend."

"Then let them call me convict — if I but possess the esteem of two honest men, who know me thoroughly, hard epithets will fall harmless."

Not another word was spoken during our walk through the streets of the city to the suburbs, where stood the rough board house of Smith, exactly as we had left it a month before. A dozen or twenty buildings had been thrown together in the vicinity during our absence, and were occupied by respectable looking people, who were engaged in business in Melbourne.

A number of fresh, rosy-faced women, true models of English wives, came to their doors as we stopped, and apparently wondered who we were.

We unlocked the door, and found every thing undisturbed; and while Smith drove off his team for the purpose of taking his oxen to pasture, I started a fire in the old stove, and Fred went after water, and to get the materials of a good supper together, which, by long fasting, we keenly felt the need of.

By the time we had eaten our meal it was past sunset, when, recollecting the business which was laid out for the morrow, we pressed Smith into service, and started towards Collins Street for the purpose of buying clothing suitable to wear when ushered into the presence of the lieutenant-governor, who, we were given to understand, did not relish flannel shirts and heavy boots, even if they did cover valued colonists.

By good luck we found a man who kept an assortment of really excellent ready-made clothing, and after chaffing with the fellow until he had reduced his prices one half, we purchased two complete suits.

Pleased with our purchases, we carried them to the house, drank one bowl of good punch, which Smith made as a sort of night-cap, as he termed it, and then lighting our pipes, turned in, and after a brief review of the events of the day, sank into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Large Fire in Melbourne. — English Machines at Fault.

I know not what the others were dreaming about, but I imagined myself standing by a pile of brush and branches, on which was placed the dead bodies of Black Darnley and his gang, and I thought that I had just applied a match to the dry wood, and that the flames were soaring heavenward, filling the sky with a luminous, blood-red color, and that the corpses, as the fire licked their bodies, began shouting, in derisive tones, for more fuel, when a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and my dreams vanished in an instant. I sprang to my feet, and even then but half awake, I reached for my revolver, and tried to recollect where I was, and how I came there. The room was as light as day, and through the single window streamed the glare of such a fire as I had seen in my dream.

I could hear the roaring of the flames, and a shouting of voices afar off; and an old cracked bell, upon a church a short distance off, was laboring hard to start into life the sleepers of the city.

"The city is on fire!" cried Smith, giving me another shake to awaken me into consciousness; "all Collins Street appears to be in a bright blaze."

"Wake Fred, and we will go and lend what assistance we can," I replied, thoroughly aroused.

While Smith proceeded to do so, I stepped to the door, and surveyed the scene, which was grand in the extreme; and I felt my blood course through my veins wildly, as old recollections of volunteer service were brought back, when gentlemen of the utmost respectability petitioned for admittance to our organization.

That fire was like the blast of a trumpet, and all the old feelings, which had lain dormant for many years, were revived, and I wished that I had an engine and a brave company, to rush to the rescue. While I stood surveying the flames, I was joined by Fred, an old fireman like myself, but cooler, and not so impulsive.

"Do you see!" I exclaimed; "half of the city appears to be in flames, and I do not hear the working of an engine. Let us hasten, and render what assistance is possible."

"Where are your engine houses?" asked Fred, turning to Smith, who appeared to be remarkably cool and unconcerned.

"That's more than I can tell, and I don't believe that even the captain of police can find one, try he ever so hard," replied Smith.

"Do you mean that there are no regularly organized companies here, to take charge of engines?" I asked.

"There are no engines nor companies, to my knowledge," Smith answered, after a moment's thought.

"Then how do you arrest conflagrations like the present?" I asked.

"Well, we send for the police," he answered, with a laugh.

"Pshaw!" I replied, impatiently, "this is no time for joking. Your city is burning down, and I do not hear the first effort to extinguish the flames."

"But I do. Hark! do you not hear that trumpet?"

We all listened, and loud above the roaring of the flames, which were filling the sky with showers of sparks, and dark, pall-like clouds of smoke, we heard the shrill tones of a trumpet.

"What is the meaning of that blast?" I asked.

"It means that the soldiers are marching to the scene of the conflagration," rejoined Smith, promptly.

"Ah, then they are to lend their aid in suppressing the flames?"

"They merely go for the purpose of seeing the building burn," replied Smith, laconically.

"Explain yourself," I cried, impatiently.

"I will. They are marched to the fire simply for the purpose of being drawn up in a line, and keeping people, who are disposed to work, away from the flames."

I looked at Smith's face, to see if he was not joking; but no, he was perfectly serious, and I began to have doubts about the ability of the Australians to subdue a conflagration under such difficulties.

"Then nothing is done by the thousands of people standing idly by, witnessing the destruction of property?" I asked.

"Well, sometimes I've known water-carts to bring water from the river, and then a few adventurous fellows will offer to throw it on to the fire. But the carts are not always to be depended upon."

"Let us go and see what we can do, Fred," I exclaimed, after the above explanation; and although Smith told us we had better remain in the house, for we should get no thanks or credit for our readiness to assist, yet we did not heed his advice, and when he saw that we were determined to go, he grumblingly offered to accompany us.

I locked the hound in the house, much against the animal's will, and then we started for the scene of the conflagration. On our way, we met and overtook hundreds of people bound on the same errand as ourselves; but to our surprise, they manifested no show of excitement, and appeared to regard the fire as a matter of course.

We hurried through the streets until we reached the thoroughfare in which the conflagration was raging. A long line of soldiers was drawn up to prevent people from approaching within twenty or thirty rods of the fire, and within the circle which they formed, were mounted policemen, with drawn sabres.

There appeared to be no effort made to extinguish the fire; the soldiers, instead of being employed to carry water, or save goods, or in blowing up buildings to arrest the flames, leaned on their guns, and looked as though they didn't care if the whole city was consumed, as long as they got enough to eat and drink. The mounted police did not

seem employed to any better purpose, and the most that I observed them do was to chase after a poor devil who squeezed through the lines in some way, and appeared anxious to save his property, or what there was left of it.

"Thank God!" exclaimed a stout man at my side, "the fire is confined to the stores of Jews. I think I'll go back to bed again."

That remark made me begin to comprehend the reason of the apathy which prevailed. The Jews were not entitled to sympathy on account of their religion. They paid their taxes, and were as much entitled to protection as Episcopalians, or men of other religious principles; but the stigma of being a Jew followed them even to Australia, where people were none too moral, and if they had not sold their Saviour it was because no one wished to buy, thinking the investment a bad one.

I longed to get to work, and once or twice I asked an officer standing near me to let us pass, and assist in extinguishing the flames. The young fop looked at me with the utmost astonishment for a moment, and then, thinking that I was an escaped lunatic, recommenced sucking the hilt of his sword with renewed energy, and without returning any answer to my petition.

"Don't mind him, poor fellow," said Fred, with a laugh at my want of success in eliciting an answer from the officer; "don't you see that he is hungry, and misses the comfort which his mother has been in the habit of yielding."

The sword hilt was withdrawn from the young fellow's mouth in an instant, and his face flushed as red as his scarlet uniform. He felt the more annoyed, because half a dozen fellows, just from the mines, all of whom were standing near, and had heard the conversation, set up a shout of laughter. Even the soldiers smiled when their officer's back was turned.

If the young fellow intended to make a reply, he was prevented, for just then the rolling of a drum attracted his attention, and there was a murmur through the crowd that the lieutenant-governor was coming to see what could be done towards suppressing the conflagration.

The soldiers presented arms, as half a dozen plainly-dressed gentlemen walked towards the end of the line where Fred, Smith, and myself were stationed. They did not stop until within a few feet of us, and from the attention which was bestowed upon one man, I had no difficulty in deciding which was the governor.

"God bless me!" exclaimed the gentleman I supposed to be the governor, a rather small man, with gray hair, and, I judged, about sixty years of age; "God bless me!" he repeated, wringing his hands as though washing them, and gazing upon the fire, "what a dreadful conflagration."

"The fire is making great headway, your excellency," said one of the gentlemen in the governor's suite.

"God bless me, so it is," replied the governor. "How careless of the Jews to let their stores get on fire. They give me a great deal of trouble."

"But shall we not do something towards suppressing the flames?" asked the first speaker, with an impatient gesture.

"God bless me, what can I do?" cried the governor, peevishly.

"There are two small engines in the city — they might be brought here and worked to advantage," urged the aide-de-camp, for such I judged him to be.

"Yes, yes, I know; but, God bless me, they won't *suck*."

I saw the governor's suite vainly endeavoring to suppress their smiles, and for a moment, such was their mirth, no further conversation ensued.

At length the aid said, —

"That difficulty can be overcome, your excellency, by pressing the water carts into service, and letting them bring water from the river for the engines to use. Much property can be saved, also, by dismissing the soldiers to the barracks with their arms, and then letting them return, and pass water in buckets. I assure your excellency that the police force is amply sufficient to keep order without the troops."

"God bless me, I believe that you are right," cried the governor, "but I don't like to set the soldiers at such work. They spoil their uniforms, and then the government has to supply them with new clothing, and I am blamed for it."

"Then let the engines be brought here, and I pledge you my word that I will find men enough in the crowd to work them without the soldiers' assistance!" exclaimed the aid, energetically.

"God bless me, if you think they are of any use, bring them here; but I don't know a person in Melbourne who understands working them."

His excellency's remark appeared to stagger the aide-de-camp, for by the light of the flames I saw him bite his lips with vexation, and glance over the crowd, as though wishing that he could find somebody who would come to his rescue.

Fred and myself could no longer keep silent. We thought that we saw an opening for our talent that should not be lost, so giving the nearest soldier a slight push one side, and narrowly escaping a thrust from a bayonet in return, we suddenly stood before the astonished group.

"We have come to ask permission to take charge of your engines," Fred said, before the aide-de-camp could find breath to order us into custody, and the soldiers appeared disposed to make prisoners of us before the word was given.

"God bless me, what is the meaning of this?" cried the governor, putting his eye-glass up, and surveying us from head to foot, as though we were animals of the *rara avis* species.

"Stand back, soldiers," cried the aide-de-camp, in a tone of command, when he saw that the men were disposed to force us amongst the crowd again, "return to your ranks, and leave me to deal with these men."

"Now, my men, what do you wish?" asked the aid; and we knew by the tones of his voice that he possessed the spirit of a man, and would know how to appreciate the services which we were disposed to render.

"We accidentally overheard a remark from the governor, that there was no one in Melbourne who understood the working of your fire-engines, so we have come to volunteer our services," Fred said, boldly.

"God bless me, but this is most extraordinary," said the governor, turning to his suite for confirmation of his words.

"Have either of you ever been accustomed to the working of an engine?" asked the aid.

"We have both belonged to a volunteer fire department," I said, "and if the machines are not entirely out of repair, we think that we can work them to advantage."

"I was not aware that there was a volunteer system in England," said the aid, whom we now understood was Colonel Hensen. He spoke in a slightly sarcastic manner, as though he had caught us in a falsehood and was determined to fathom our motives.

"We were not speaking of England, sir," I said, with some little asperity.

"Pray, what country do you allude to, then, if I may ask?" the colonel inquired.

"We meant our country, sir; we are not Englishmen, but Americans."

I saw the frown vanish from the brow of Colonel Hensen, and a look of good nature passed over his face; but before he had an opportunity to speak, the governor had his eye-glass up, and exclaimed,—

"God bless me, you don't mean to say that because you are Americans you can extinguish this fire? Pray, what part of the United States do you come from, that you possess such assurance?"

"We were both born within the shadow of Bunker Hill, your excellency, and that famous spot overlooks Boston, a city of some importance in America."

I heard a good-natured laugh at Fred's speech, although I was fearful that those present would not relish joking at their ancestors' expense. But I was mistaken; even the withered features of Mr. Latrobe relaxed their expression of distrust, and he cried, "God bless me," and wrung his hands for a minute or two before he spoke.

"If these young men think they can do any good with the engines, why, God bless me, I don't know but they had better take charge of them," the governor said, after a brief survey of the fire, and seeing what headway it was making.

"I will answer for these two young men, your excellency," said a deep voice, whose tones we recognized; and looking up, I found that our old acquaintance, the captain of police, had approached us, unseen, and overheard a part of the discussion.

"Ha, captain," cried the governor, "you don't mean to say that you know these two persons? God bless me, how singular."

"Not very extraordinary, sir, when I tell you that these are the Americans whom I asked your excellency to receive to-day, and whose petition I hope you will grant," replied the captain.

"God bless me, it isn't possible that these are the two Americans who have been killing and making prisoners of those bushranging villains? Why, they have hardly grown to be men!"

The governor seemed to forget the fire, for he surveyed us through his eye-glass, and whispered to members of his suite, and said that he hoped "God would bless him;" and I am sure I hope that the Almighty will, for Mr. Latrobe has asked for it often enough.

Fred and myself were the centre of observation, and perhaps our modesty was a little touched, for we heard the captain whisper to Colonel Hensen, something like the following:—

"Murden tells me they are perfect dare-devils, and care no more for a gang of bushrangers than for a troop of kangaroos. I am going to coax them to enter the service."

I don't think that by morning there would have been a single Jewish house or Christian store left in Collins Street if we had not again reminded the governor that the fire was raging more fiercely than ever, and that if the flames were to be checked it was high time to commence work.

"Our American friends are right," said Colonel Hensen, "and if your excellency is disposed to comply with their request no time is to be lost."

"God bless me, then let them go to work without delay. I give them full power to take as many men as they please to work the engines, and if they succeed in quenching the flames they shall be well rewarded."

"We ask for no reward, sir," I said, "but we do ask for one hundred of these soldiers. Let them be despatched after the machines without delay."

The governor hesitated for a moment, and then gave Colonel Hensen directions to comply with my request.

Two companies deposited their arms in a building near by, and were detailed for the duty, while an officer was sent to hunt up the water carts, and get them filled at the river, so that the engines could have something to work upon.

We set Smith at work hunting up buckets, and then accepted volunteers, who formed a long line, and passed the pails back and forth with great rapidity.

A dozen reckless miners, just from the diggings, clambered to the tops of the houses nearest to the fire, and dashed the water on the roof and sides, and by this means held the flames in check until other lines were formed. In half an hour nearly fifteen hundred buckets were at work, and thrice that number of volunteers were lending their aid.

Fred and myself were every where, encouraging and giving directions; the police seconded our efforts, and saw that our orders were carried into effect, and they did so the more readily because we recognized all of our old companions of bush-hunting memory, and they quickly imparted our history to the rest of the force.

By the time our lines were in good working order we heard the rumbling of the engines, and with hearty cheers the soldiers dashed into the hollow square, the crowd opening to the right and left to admit them. With perfect firemen's enthusiasm they ran the machines close to the flames, unlimbered the huge tongues which obstructed half the street, and were nearly as large as the engines themselves, and then, with a recollection of their discipline, touched their fatigue caps, and asked what was to be the next move.

We looked at our unpromising machines and found that they were of English make, and capable of throwing a stream about as large as garden engines. They were covered with dust and dirt, and had not been worked for a twelvemonth; but nothing discouraged, we washed some of the thickest of the cobwebs away, examined the screws, filled the dry and cracked boxes with water, adjusted the hose, and then applied

the brakes. A low, wheezing sound was heard, which resembled the breathing of a person troubled with asthma, but no water was ejected.

The soldiers laughed, and ridiculed the machines, and the crowd outside of the square getting wind of our failure, shouted in derision at the "governor's pets," as they were called.

"I say, old fellows," cried a voice, "I've got a syringe in my trunk at home that you can use. It will be of more service than those machines."

"Grease 'em," shouted another.

"Play away, No. 2," yelled a loafer.

"Hold on, No. 1," shouted a fourth; and as No. 1 had been compelled to hold on for the want of water, which leaked from the boxes almost as fast as put in, the joke told hugely.

"You can do nothing with them," said Colonel Hensen, joining us, and noticing the condition of the machines. "I think that you had better send them back to the houses, and depend upon the buckets. The fire has not gained headway for fifteen minutes."

"We are not easily discouraged, sir," replied Fred, and together we proceeded to examine the boxes of the engines attentively.

We found a screw, which regulated the flow of water, nearly off, and the plug in the bottom of the box out. The latter explained the leakage at once, and by the time we had regulated matters the water carts arrived, and once more we filled the boxes and started the brakes. After wheezing and sputtering a moment, a slight stream appeared at the nozzle of the hose. It was greeted with yells of laughter, not only from those who were passing water in buckets, but even the soldiers joined in the cries. The crowd took up the yells, and in a few minutes it seemed as though Bedlam had broken loose.

Not discouraged by the ridicule heaped upon us and the engines, we kept the boxes full and the soldiers at work on the brakes. The result was as we had anticipated. The stream grew larger and larger as the wood and leather began to swell, and in a few minutes after the brakes were applied the second time a noble stream was playing on the flames, and the roofs and sides of houses in danger of burning.

Crowds are always fickle, and easily swerved by success or failure. In this instance we had no reason to complain of want of applause, for cheer after cheer was raised in honor of our perseverance, and Colonel Hensen was despatched by the governor to thank us on the spot for our labor.

Leaving the hose to be directed by an intelligent sergeant of one of the companies, we next turned our attention to the second engine, and succeeded in repairing that also; and although at times we were obliged to await the arrival of the water carts to keep the boxes filled, having no hose for draughting, we managed to keep up two decently sized streams, and with the assistance of the buckets, prevented the fire from spreading to other buildings.

All night long did we work, sometimes up to our knees in mud, encouraging and directing — running greater risks of being crushed under falling buildings than I should like to enjoy again — resisting the appeals of Jews, who offered large amounts of money if we would only direct the men to save their houses and stores, and getting well abused when

we refused to comply — treating all alike, working for the greatest good, until daylight appeared and the fire was subdued, and Melbourne was saved from destruction.

I looked around for the lieutenant-governor. He had wrung his hands three hours before, and asked "God to bless him," and declared that he was tired and must retire to bed, and to bed he had gone; and the only member of his staff on the ground was Colonel Hensen.

"You have worked hard enough, gentlemen," said the officer, shaking our hands with a friendly grip. "Go to your home, and leave the rest to me and my men."

"We do not feel near as tired as those gallant fellows," Fred said, pointing to the soldiers who still manned the brakes of the engines.

"I intend to have them relieved immediately, and allow them all day to get rested," answered the officer.

"Then we will return home, for our presence is no longer needed here," I replied.

"Before you go let me thank you in the name of the lieutenant-governor. Through your instrumentality thousands of pounds' worth of property has been saved; and our merchants owe you a debt of gratitude which I hope they will repay before you leave the city."

"We hope thanks will be the only coin offered," cried Fred, quickly, "for we would not have you think that we have labored through the night for hire. If we have been instrumental in doing your city a service we are glad of it, because it may be the means of obtaining a better reputation for Americans than they have hitherto enjoyed in Australia."

"I shall ever look upon Americans with respect from this time forward," the colonel said, warmly. Once more he shook our hands, and then we called Smith and edged our way through the crowd to the rude house, where I found the hound had broken half a dozen panes of glass in his desperate attempts to escape and join me.

Tired and almost exhausted with our night's work, we quickly threw ourselves upon our hard beds, and slept soundly, nor did we awaken until the loud baying of the hound aroused us.

CHAPTER XIX.

Pardon of Smith and the old Stockman. — Grand Dinner at the Governor's.

"Hullo," I heard somebody shout; "is this the way you receive your friends? Call off the dog, or he'll eat me for his dinner."

I started up and spoke to the hound, and then saw, to my surprise, that our visitor was no other than the captain of police.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," he said, taking a seat, and looking around the room with a quiet smile upon his broad face. "I know that

you have had a hard night's work, and need rest; and I should not have presumed to awaken you, had I not feared that you would forget the audience which his excellency has granted on this afternoon."

"At what time, may I ask?" I inquired, trying to look as though I was awake — in which I did not fully succeed, I am afraid, for the captain said, kindly, —

"There, there, go to bed again, and let the audience be postponed until to-morrow. Latrobe will readily understand why you are not present, and if he does not, I will get Colonel Hensen to explain the reason. By the way, speaking of the colonel, he has grown to be a sworn friend to both of you, and as he has the governor's ear in all matters, I think it will be well to speak to him in a candid manner, and enlist his aid."

We bowed, without speaking at the advice, and the captain continued, —

"Then I will ask the governor to postpone your interview until to-morrow, if you desire it."

"By no means," exclaimed Fred, the last words thoroughly arousing him. "We have not had much rest for a number of nights, but we are not so tired that we cannot keep an appointment. We shall be ready at the time you state."

"Then in two hours' time I will send Murden for you. By the way," the captain continued, in a careless tone, "if there is any thing I can help you to, command me."

We knew that the captain alluded to our clothes, but we merely shook our heads and declared that we had a full supply. He looked incredulous, but was too polite to contradict, and was about to depart, when he suddenly said, —

"By the way, I don't suppose you have seen the morning papers? Here are the Argus and Herald. You may like to look over them, as they contain an account of the fire, and mention the gallant conduct of two American gentlemen who were present."

The captain laid down the papers, and was off without a word of explanation. We felt that keen curiosity characteristic of Americans when they know that their names are in print, and hardly had the sound of the hoofs of the captain's horse died away before we spread open the sheets, and after hunting over a column of matter which related to losses, with the names of individuals, we came across the following, headed, —

"INCIDENTS. — During the fire this morning, two young men, whose names are unknown, but whom we hope to discover before our next issue, made their way to his excellency the governor, and volunteered to take the whole charge of the fire, and put the two hitherto almost useless engines in working order. After some hesitation on the part of his excellency, consent was given, and two companies of a regiment allotted to man the brakes. Under the direction of the young men the machines were brought into action, and were the means of saving property to a large amount. We also hear it stated that the same parties organized the lines of buckets, although we do not vouch for the truth of the statement.

"P. S. — Since writing the above, we learn that the young men are

Americans, and are the same who appeared in the procession yesterday afternoon. They have been engaged by the police force for the last three weeks in hunting bushrangers. We shall give the public the most reliable information to be obtained concerning them, and shall issue an extra containing a history of their lives and adventures, illustrated with correct likenesses."

"I wonder how the editor expects to get a history of our lives, and a correct likeness?" laughed Fred, laying down the Argus and taking up the Herald.

The latter paper was more disposed to glorify the governor and his government than ourselves, and as Mr. Latrobe was not in great favor with the citizens of Melbourne and the miners at the time, an attempt was made to create some capital for him. The article read as follows: —

"Our readers will recollect that the lieutenant-governor promised the miners that the roads between the city and Ballarat should be free of robbers in less than six months. Hardly three months have passed, and we find that his excellency has made good his assertion. He has taken the most active measures to bring to speedy justice the numerous gangs of bushrangers who have preyed upon travellers and escorts, going to and returning from the mines. Already have two of the most formidable robbers in the country fallen, and with them the destruction of their followers. Black Darnley and Jim Gulpin are both dead. They have paid the penalty of their crimes, and the community will thank the government for the active measures which were taken to bring about such a result. Our police department is now in a better state of efficiency than ever known before; and it is the determination, we understand, of the governor to increase its force until he has redeemed his pledge, and made Australia a law-loving and law-abiding country.

"We understand that the two men whose dress and appearance occasioned so many remarks while the procession was moving through our streets yesterday afternoon, are two recruits who are to be added to the police force with the rank of sergeants. They were both born in the United States, but their parents are English, and still claim Great Britain as their homes. We understand that they distinguished themselves gallantly in the conflict which ensued between the bushrangers and the police, and for that reason they are to be rewarded by being taken into our municipal force.

"P. S. — We understand that the men mentioned above were very active at the fire this morning, and that if any property was saved by their efforts the governor should have the credit for the same, for to him belongs the suggestion of allowing the police force to work as firemen, and also giving his consent that the military should have charge of the engines. We hope the citizens of Melbourne will remember these facts, and know in what light to regard the attacks made upon his excellency by the Argus, whose editor left England for causes which have not yet transpired, although we dare say that communications addressed to the Home office would be promptly answered."

"Well, of all the impudence," laughed Fred. "The puppy should be whipped — and I've a great mind to go and do it."

"I don't see any thing to be enraged at," I replied, coolly. "Because he says that we are to enter the police force, does not make it so; and as for the rest of his remarks, you are too good an American not to think highly of the man for his ingenious effort to create popularity for his favorite office-holder."

Fred smiled as he thought of the freedom of the press in our country, and I heard no more about whipping the unfortunate editor of the Herald.

"Come," cried Smith, who had sat silent during our reading of the papers, "you must be getting ready for your visit to the governor. He receives at three, and dines about six."

"I suppose we shall have to stop and dine with him," said Fred, with a sly wink at me.

"You surely don't think of such a thing?" demanded Smith, with horror depicted upon his face.

"Why, you don't pretend to say that the governor is any better than us poor adventurers?" asked Fred.

Smith struggled a moment with his feelings, as though trying to find a suitable reply in which he should not offend us, and yet not outrage the exalted idea which he entertained respecting his excellency. At length love for us overcame his reverence, and he blubbered out,—

"Hang it, you know what I mean — the governor is placed in a high position, but I'd rather have a shake of your hands than fifty men like him. Don't talk to me any more, but get ready to visit him; and if he don't ask you to dinner, all that I can say is, he don't know you as well as I do."

We followed the advice of Smith without a word of remonstrance, and in a short time our long, ragged beards had fallen before the sharp edges of our razors, and after a refreshing bath in a tub, the only bathing-pan we could find in the city, we dressed ourselves in our new clothes, and once more felt that clean linen was more becoming to gentlemen, in spite of its democracy, than blue flannel.

For the first time for many months were our limbs encased in broadcloth, and our feet denied the privilege of an extended range of sole leather. Smith surveyed us, and rubbed his hands with delight. We had evidently made an impression upon him in our new dresses, and to tell the truth, we felt somewhat vain of it.

Punctual to the hour, we heard some one drive up to the door, and were in a moment greeted by Murden, although at first he did not recognize the two demure looking strangers seated in the room as his late companions.

His grip was none the less hearty, however, and even while he was asking a half dozen different questions concerning us, he hurried us along into a vehicle that somewhat resembled a chaise, although much heavier, and drawn by two horses.

The lieutenant assumed the reins, and away we rattled, the hound bounding by the side of the carriage, and sometimes making playful snaps at the horses' heads, causing the animals to swerve from the middle of the road, much to Murden's disgust and the dog's delight.

"I heard of your doings last night," Murden said, as we rattled towards the government house, causing people to stare in astonishment at

the recklessness of our pace. "You did nobly, I am told, and those blasted Jews had ought to come down liberally with their dust, in the shape of a present."

"We were not working in the expectation of reward," Fred began, when the licutenant cut him short.

"I know all about that, but if those cussed Jews are disposed to give you any thing, don't refuse to accept it, because it would gratify them too much."

Before we had an opportunity to enter into an argument, the carriage was driven, with much parade, up to the door of a substantial, freestone house, before which a number of soldiers were keeping guard, as though there was danger of the governor being run away with by some evil-disposed persons unless there was a show of force.

We were shown through a long entry, or corridor, and ushered into a reception room, plainly furnished, and with only one engraving hanging from the walls. It was a likeness of the queen, in coronation robes, opening parliament.

Half a dozen persons were lounging in the room, awaiting an audience; and as we were the last comers, of course all eyes were directed upon us, and we could read an expression upon their faces, as much as to say, "what in the deuse do they want with the governor?"

Murden nodded carelessly to those present, and when one, more inquisitive than his fellows, took him by the button hole, and, in a whisper, asked him who we were, I heard him say, in reply, —

"Hush! don't pretend to look at them, or they will shoot you without mercy. They are Americans, and carry revolvers and bowie knives by the dozen."

The inquirer, rather a small sized man, after that hardly removed his eyes from us, and when word came from the governor that we were to be shown into his room, the little fellow looked after us as though he never expected to see such a sight again, and was determined to improve his opportunity.

We mounted a flight of stairs, broad and imposing, as became a governor's palace, and then the servant, who had us in charge, stopped before an open door, at which was stationed a man in livery. To the latter was given our names, and in a loud voice the fellow repeated them; at the same time he stood aside and allowed us to pass into the presence of his excellency, the lieutenant-governor.

Mr. Latrobe was standing near a window, which overlooked the street, and was conversing with Colonel Hensen, the captain of police, and a number of other gentlemen, whose faces we were not acquainted with.

Colonel Hensen advanced to meet us as we entered, and then, in due form, presented us to the governor.

"God bless me," said his excellency, rubbing his hands as though he had caught cold the night before, and he wished to quicken the circulation of his blood, "God bless me, can it be possible?"

He didn't say what it was that surprised him so much, but I gave a shrewd guess that our change of costume had improved our appearance to such a degree that we should have been passed in the street by our most intimate friends unrecognized.

"Don't be backward in making known your wants," whispered the colonel, while the governor was wringing his hands.

"Both of you, gentlemen, are entitled to my warmest gratitude for the zeal which you displayed last night," the governor at length said, "and I embrace the present opportunity to thank you. God bless me, I wish that all of the emigrants who reach our shores were of the same stamp. We should be more prosperous and happy."

"We trust, for the honor of America, that all who claim our country as their home will never give your excellency cause of uneasiness," Fred said, with a slight bow.

"God bless me, I hope not," echoed the governor. "But I have great cares on my mind, great cares; and sometimes I think that I shall have to return to old England, and let some younger man occupy my place."

The governor's suite maintained a profound silence, which struck us as very singular; but then we did not know that a new ruler was on his way to Australia, and that the home government had got most heartily tired of the vacillating policy of Mr. Latrobe, and that the several gentlemen who surrounded him were aware of it, and were all ready to pay court to the rising star, as soon as he set foot ashore at Melbourne.

Finding that no one replied, the governor slowly chafed his hands, and said, —

"We owe you another debt of gratitude, I believe, for the gallantry which prompted you to risk your lives, when you joined forces with our police. You intimated that you had some request to make of me, as a reward for your conduct. Pray, let me hear what your petition is, and if it be reasonable, I will grant it."

For the first time did the governor seem to act the part of a ruler. He threw off, as with a violent effort, all of his shuffling and weakness, and stood before us a man. Perhaps the little sympathy which he saw expressed upon the faces of his suite was the cause of his changing.

"If we have been instrumental in freeing your roads of robbers," I said, calmly and distinctly, "it is not because we thirsted for the blood of the unfortunate men, but simply from a desire to pass to and from the mines without molestation. We do not, of course, know in what light the captain of police has reported our conduct, but there are others more deserving than ourselves, and to them should be awarded all the credit, if, indeed, there is any credit in resisting when attacked."

"I think that mention was made concerning two convicts who had displayed considerable bravery, but it had nearly escaped my mind. Do your remarks refer to them?" inquired the governor.

"They do, sir," I said, "and in their behalf do we appear before you to-day, knowing that your excellency will kindly consider all we say, and grant our petition."

"Go on, sir," said the governor, with a wave of his hand that was full of grace and dignity.

"The two convicts who were brought to the notice of your excellency fought with us side by side, and in one engagement, a band of desperate bushrangers were destroyed before the police made their appearance. Black Darnley, the leader of the gang, was killed, and knowing that a large reward was offered for his arrest or death, we

thought your excellency would exercise your usual clemency and grant the men a free pardon for their past offences."

"You know not what you ask for," said the governor, hastily, and I thought impatiently; and then in a milder tone he continued: "I am so hampered by the home government that I rarely interfere in such matters, and would much rather some other request were preferred."

"But let your excellency consider. These men have been on tickets of leave for a number of years, and not a word of complaint has been received against them. I believe that I am justified in referring to the captain of police for confirmation of my words."

The captain bowed, and smiled at my earnestness, and I continued:

"One of them, by honest industry, has accumulated a large property, but the dreadful sentence of the court still clings to him, and if an enemy, actuated by the desire to despoil him of his fortune, should prefer a complaint, he would be arrested and consigned to the hulks, to die perhaps of a broken heart. That is not the proper fate of a gallant man, who has the good of the colony at heart, and is willing to shed his blood in its defence."

"Ask of me any thing but the pardon of the two persons you mention, and I shall be most happy to grant it," replied the governor, after a moment's thought, and a half irresolute glance at Colonel Hensen, as though asking his opinion before deciding.

"We have no other request to make, may it please your excellency," answered Fred, with dignity. "We came to Melbourne expressly to ask for the men's pardon, and as it is not granted, you will allow us to take our leave."

We bowed and stepped towards the door. The governor looked astonished at our independence, and after a moment's whispering with his suite, he recalled us.

"On one condition will I comply with your request," he said, and I saw that the old weakness had returned to his face, and that he was no longer the dignified executive officer.

"We await the proposition," I said.

"Why, the fact is, I have heard such good accounts of both of you, that I am desirous of retaining your services. You are anxious for the full pardon of the two convicts. I will comply with your request provided you enter the police service for five years. The rank of lieutenants will be bestowed on both of you."

"We are under the necessity of declining your intended kindness," replied Fred, ironically, "and as we cannot obtain what we wish without sacrificing our independence, we again take our leave."

I saw a smile of satisfaction beam on the face of the colonel, and I knew that our course met his approval.

"God bless me, what do they want?" asked the governor, in an agony of irresolution, appealing to the colonel.

"They ask for no more than what your excellency should grant," replied the colonel, bluntly.

"But suppose the convicts should commit fresh crimes after I have pardoned them?" asked the governor. "What would the home office say?"

"Point to the good which the men have done, and see if it does not outweigh heavy faults," replied the colonel.

"You are right, and the petition of the young men is granted. Call to-morrow at the office of the secretary, and obtain the documents; at the same time let me inform you that if the home office does not concur in my decision, the pardons are void. I do not anticipate any serious objections, however, when I state the reasons which have governed my conduct."

We thanked his excellency in suitable terms, and were about turning away, when an almost imperceptible movement on the part of Colonel Hensen claimed our attention. Slight as it was, we understood him, and determined to strike while the iron was hot.

"We do not wish to give your excellency unnecessary trouble, but if you would instruct your secretary to furnish the pardons this afternoon, we know of one man who will receive it as the greatest birthday present that can be given him."

"God bless me, is that the case?" cried the governor.

We repeated our statement that Smith's birthday would be celebrated in a becoming manner, if his excellency was disposed to be lenient.

"Then God forbid that I should be the cause of any one's unhappiness. Mr. Secretary, prepare the documents, and I will sign them immediately."

The governor had hardly ceased before the gentleman referred to had left the room. While he was absent a number of questions was asked us concerning our country, and I think a few of our replies surprised not only Mr. Latrobe, but the staff which surrounded him.

"God bless me! it's marvellous to think of. The Americans are a great people, there's no denying it, and I think in time will even equal the parent country."

We did not enter into any argument with those present concerning the relative strength of the two nations, but just as a question was addressed to us regarding our navy, the secretary returned and handed two papers to the governor, who, after a brief glance at their contents, affixed his signature, and handed the documents to us.

"There, I have gratified you, young gentlemen, and now I request a return for my kindness," said the governor, smiling.

"Any thing that your excellency may wish," stammered Fred, hardly knowing what was coming.

"I wish both of you to stop and dine with me to-day, and if you refuse, never ask me for another pardon."

The governor smiled good-humoredly as we hesitated, and before we knew how to frame an excuse we were moving towards the dining-room arm-in-arm with Colonel Hensen and the captain of police.

That dinner will long live in my memory, not only for the good cheer, to which we had long been strangers, but for the social manner in which we were treated by the governor and his guests.

Even the hound, who had received a large share of attention, was permitted to enter the dining-room, and by the manner in which his eyes glistened I thought he appeared to enjoy himself as well as the rest of the company.

CHAPTER XX.

Duel Between Fred and an English Lieutenant.

Even at this distant day, I think that I have a faint recollection of walking through the streets of Melbourne at a late hour on the afternoon that we dined with the governor — and I also think that we were escorted to our home by Colonel Hensen, and a number of other gentlemen, although who they were I have not the slightest recollection.

It was a late hour the next morning, when we awoke with aching heads and parched throats. Our faithful friend, Smith, was stirring, and by the aroma we knew that a strong dish of coffee had been prepared by his hands, and that it awaited us as soon as we rose — an act which we had no inclination to do; but a sight of his sorrowful face as he spread the table, made me alter my mind.

I slipped on my clothes, and bathed my heated head in cool water just taken from the river, and felt refreshed by the operation; and by the time Fred had gone through with the same process, breakfast was pronounced ready, and down to it we sat with but scant appetites.

"What have you got such a long face on for this morning?" I asked of the stockman, who hardly raised his eyes while he was drinking his coffee.

"Can you ask?" he replied, looking up, and I saw by the expression of his face that he had not slept during the night.

"Can I ask?" I repeated, "to be sure I can. We got a little out of the way last night, but the circumstance is too common to provoke remark in Australia."

"Ah, it was not that I was thinking about. I was considering how unkind the governor has treated me, in not granting me freedom after so many years of good conduct," replied Smith.

"O, is that all?" I cried, with an appearance of indifference. "I thought you were sick, or had heard some bad news."

I saw the poor fellow's face flush at my apparently unkind speech, and I saw an expression of surprise in his blue eyes which cut me to the heart. I sprang from the table, and taking from my coat pocket the two pardons, laid them before him without a word of remark.

His eyes were, the instant he read his name, blinded with tears. He laid his head upon the table, and wept long and bitterly without speaking, and his stout frame shook with the violence of his emotion. We suffered him to continue without interruption; but when he did look up, he grasped our hands, and pressed them convulsively, muttering, —

"At length, O, at length, I'm a free man, and no longer subject to a keeper's nod. I can call my soul and body my own property, and look a policeman in the face without trembling. Ah, blessed liberty, how much I have longed for thee!"

He kissed the pardon — he kissed his name, which was written in a bold hand on the document — and then pressed to his lips the signature of the governor.

"Do you now feel truly happy?" asked Fred.

"I feel so joyous that there is nothing on earth which I crave," replied Smith.

"Then we may ask you to lend us your aid before many days, and I hope that you will not refuse."

"Me refuse? Ask of me the most difficult task and I will do it; for to you do I owe freedom," cried our friend, enthusiastically.

Fred was about to confide to him the secret of the buried treasure, and solicit his aid, when we were interrupted by the entrance of a stranger, dressed in the uniform of an English officer.

"I beg your pardon, sirs," he said, glancing around the hut with a slightly supercilious air at the want of comfort which was plainly manifest, "but I think I have entered the wrong house."

"We cannot tell whether you have or not, until we know what your business is," replied Fred.

"My business has reference to two gentlemen who dined with the governor yesterday, and were conspicuous at the fire night before last," replied the officer, who was a young man, and of prepossessing appearance.

"Then it is very probable we are the parties," said Fred, carelessly. "We dined with the governor yesterday, and we did something towards extinguishing the fire on Collins Street night before last."

"One other question, gentlemen, and I shall be certain. Are you Americans?" demanded the officer.

"We claim the United States as our home, and to the best of our belief, we were born there," I answered, wondering what the fellow was driving at.

"Then you will excuse me for the disagreeable duty which I have taken upon myself. Night before last one of you gentlemen addressed words of an insulting nature to a brother officer. As long as he thought you were beneath the rank of gentlemen he did not choose to notice them, but the governor having recognized you as an equal, my friend feels that he can safely demand satisfaction, or an ample apology for your remark."

"Why," said Fred, with a soft smile, "this looks to me like a challenge."

"It is one," replied the Englishman.

"And I am expected to retract the words which I uttered, or be shot?" asked Fred.

"If you are the gentleman who uttered them, I must reply, yes," answered the officer.

"Well, upon my word, I hardly know what I did say," cried Fred. "Do you recollect?" he added, appealing to me.

I shook my head, and remained silent. I was thinking of the danger my friend was in, and wondering how I could get him out of it.

"I think that my friend had the hilt of his sword in his mouth, and your allusion was to the infantile instinct which prompted him to do so," replied the officer, looking red in the face.

"O," laughed Fred, "did the youngster take offence at my words? Tell him that hereafter I will swear that he was brought up on a bottle."

"This is no apology, sir," cried the officer, inclined to laugh.

"Isn't it? Well, it's all that I am disposed to give, at present;" and Fred helped himself to a fresh cup of coffee.

"By the way," I continued, "perhaps you have not been to breakfast. Pray be seated, and have a dish of coffee."

The officer hesitated for a moment, but thinking, perhaps, that he could best arrange the affair while sipping coffee, he finally took his seat upon an old box, while Smith helped him to a cracked cup minus a saucer.

"Then there is no way of arranging this little affair, is there?" asked the officer, whom we now understood was Lieutenant Merriam.

"O, yes, there are half a dozen ways," replied Fred, coolly. "In the first place, your friend can withdraw his challenge ——"

"Never!" exclaimed the officer, firmly. "We feel too deeply injured."

"And in the next place, I can refuse to accept it," Fred continued, without noticing the interruption.

"But you will apologize," cried Merriam, eagerly. "Say that you will do that, and I will take my leave."

"Then I shall do no such thing, for we are not often forced into the company of her majesty's officers, and we wish to improve the acquaintance."

The lieutenant looked at Fred as though mentally calculating what kind of a man he was, but in spite of his dignity and bold face, he smiled, and held out his cup for more coffee.

"Then I suppose that you will refer me to a friend with whom I can consult, and settle all preliminary arrangements?" inquired the officer.

"Tell me," asked Fred, for the first time looking serious, "is your friend really in earnest in this matter?"

"I have to inform you that he is, sir; and that, as his friend, I have promised to see him through the affair with honor," our visitor replied.

"Then I will gratify his fighting propensities, as I do not feel disposed to retract words which, under the circumstances, he should have considered as harmless. Jack, my boy," Fred said, turning to me, "will you settle with this gentleman when the affair shall come off, and act by me the part of a friend?"

I knew the nature of the man too well to try and dissuade him from the duel — the most that I could do was to stand by him and endeavor to turn every thing to his advantage. I gave him the promise he required, when turning to Smith, who had sat at the table a patient listener, during the whole conversation, Fred said —

"Come, Smith, you and I will visit the scene of the fire, and leave them together."

"Now to business," the lieutenant said. "You are the challenged party, and have the right to choose weapons. I have a beautiful pair of pistols at the barracks, which I wish you would make choice of. You will fall in love with them at the first sight."

"Very probable," I replied, coolly; "but if pistols are to settle the quarrel, I have a pair of Colt's revolvers which I know will command your admiration. Here are the two instruments," and, as I spoke, I laid them on the table.

"A murderous looking weapon, and not suited for the use of gentle-

men at ten paces," Merriam said, handling the revolvers with great respect.

"So I thought," I replied composedly, "and have resolved to have nothing to do with pistols of any kind. They are an unsatisfactory weapon, and a man has got to be a good shot to put a ball just where he pleases at ten paces."

"Ah, then you have concluded to try the sword? A more gentlemanly weapon it would be hard to find. Let swords decide it, then."

I saw a glow of satisfaction upon the face of the lieutenant, and I knew that his principal was an adept in the use of the sword as well as though he had told me in so many words.

"I cannot make choice of the sword," I replied, "because my friend does not understand its use, and therefore the advantage would be all on your side."

"Then pray name what weapon you will fight with," Merriam said, impatiently.

"This is the weapon we will use," I replied, producing, to the astonishment of the officer, my three foot six inch barrel rifle, which, during our absence the day before, Smith had cleaned and polished up thoroughly.

"What is that?" he asked, astonished.

"This," I replied, "is an American rifle, and a very good one it is, I assure you."

"But we cannot fight with only one, and unless another is produced precisely like it, some other weapon will have to be resorted to," cried the officer, with a slight expression of joy.

"I am aware of that," I replied coolly, and to his astonishment I presented him with a fac-simile of the first.

"These rifles," I remarked, "were both made by the same person, and he was instructed to manufacture them without a shade of difference in regard to size or weight. The only method we have of telling them apart is to consult the stocks, where our names are engraved. Examine them attentively, and then select whichever you please. One is as good as the other, and each carries well."

The Englishman stared at the rifles with a countenance blank with dismay. They were weapons which he was entirely unacquainted with, and he felt that the safety of his principal demanded a remonstrance against their use.

"I object to the use of rifles," he said, at length, firmly and decidedly. "My friend is entirely unacquainted with these kind of weapons, and it would be madness on his part to go to the field with such odds against him."

I listened calmly, and with my mind unchanged. I knew that Fred's safety depended upon my selection, and inwardly vowed that if he had got to fight, he should settle the difficulty with his own weapons.

"This quarrel," I remarked, "is not of our seeking. A few words were spoken in jest by my friend, and as soon as spoken were forgotten; and it is probable that even now we should not remember the man we insulted. If my friend has got to fight, he shall be placed upon an equality with his adversary."

"But I do not call this equality," echoed the lieutenant, gazing with looks of dismay at the rifles.

"Neither do I feel disposed to risk my friend's life with swords, a weapon which he knows nothing of," I replied.

"Then perhaps we had better settle the matter satisfactorily without fighting," Mr. Merriam said.

"With all my heart," I cried, with alacrity. "I will meet you half way in any scheme of pacification."

"Then let your friend say that he is sorry for using the words, and send a note to that effect to my principal."

"We can't do that," I replied, after a moment's thought. "But I will tell you what we will do. We will say that during all our travels we never saw a man who could suck a sword hilt so gracefully as your friend."

"Pshaw," cried the Englishman with a grim smile, "don't let us trifle over the matter, it is too serious."

"I know that, and it's the very reason why I wish to settle the quarrel without bloodshed," I answered.

"Then you decline to apologize?" inquired Merriam, after a short pause, during which he helped himself to another cup of coffee.

"Only on the grounds which I have stated," I answered.

"And you still insist upon rifles being used?" continued he.

"A just regard which I have for my friend compels me to say that I cannot conscientiously consent to use any other weapon. At the same time I protest against being called to the field for a few words spoken in jest."

The Englishman slowly sipped his coffee and remained deep in thought, as though there was some matter on his mind in which he wished enlightenment, yet feared to broach the subject. At length he showed his hand, and I saw his move.

"The rifle is extensively used in America, I believe," Merriam said, carelessly.

"In some sections of the country it is a favorite weapon," I replied.

"I have heard much of the rifle shooting in the United States, and have often longed to witness a specimen of the skill of its marksmen. Has your friend seen much service with that weapon?"

"He has lived in a city since he was twelve years of age," I replied, evasively, "and in cities there is not much chance to practise."

"Then he is not a skilful marksman?" cried Merriam, eagerly.

"He is fair," I replied. "In Vermont he would be called only a third-rate marksman."

"And pray, may I ask what you call a first class marksman?"

"A good rifle shot is a man who can hit a shilling piece five times out of six, standing at a distance which requires a telescope to see the money."

"And what is a third-class marksman?" asked the lieutenant, in dismay.

"He can hit the same only twice out of six times," I replied, composedly.

"The devil!" I heard my visitor mutter, between his teeth; but he was too much of an Englishman to retreat, and I fancied that he grew

more and more determined when he learned that the odds were against him.

"The only matter that now remains unsettled," the lieutenant said, "is when the affair is to come off. What time do you think you shall be at leisure?"

"At any hour that suits your convenience."

"Would to-morrow morning be too soon?" hinted the officer.

"That time is as well as at a later period."

"And the distance? We must not talk about feet, but how many rods our friends are to be placed apart?" Merriam said.

"I have given the subject a moment's consideration," I replied, "and think that ten rods will be better for your friend than double that distance."

"I shall certainly venture to disagree with you on that point," replied the lieutenant. "I think that twenty rods is full near enough."

"Why, they will hardly be able to distinguish each other so far apart," I said; "but you shall have it as you wish."

"Thank you. Then nothing farther remains but to point out a very beautiful spot where the business can be settled in the most amicable manner. If you will step to the door I think I can show you the field, with not a tree or hill that can line either party on ground. Ah, yes, there it is, away to the right after passing the end of the road, and beyond the white fence. Do you see it?"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"Well, say five in the morning to be on the ground. Does that suit your convenience?"

"Perfectly."

"Then good-by. By the way, may I ask you to bring the rifles to the ground? I am sorry to trouble you, but in the case you know ——"

"I understand. Be under no concern; I will see that the guns are in good condition, and ready for your loading."

"Thank you. Another request I have to make. May I ask that you will not bring a surgeon on the ground, but trust to the regimental one whom we shall have present. You are strangers, and by expressing a desire for a doctor, might communicate an alarm to the police, which would have a tendency to postpone the meeting."

"I thank you for the suggestion, sir," I answered, "and will do as you request; although I frankly tell you, that I hope there will be no occasion for a surgeon to exercise his duties."

"The affair has gone too far to be stopped without blood-letting, I think," replied Merriam, shaking his head, "although with some men I should not yet give up all hope of a pacification."

He shook me warmly by the hand as he took his departure, and I was left alone to meditate on the disagreeable duty which I had assumed for my best friend. I little thought, at the time I was so calmly making the arrangements for the duel, that his adversary, Lieutenant Wattles, had already killed two men, in spite of his youth, and that a more determined duellist did not exist on the island.

I had just mixed a strong glass of punch, and was about to raise it to my lips, for the purpose of looking cheerful when Fred returned, when I heard his voice.

"Ah, that is stealing a march on us, old boy," he shouted, pleasantly. "Here have we been parading the dusty streets of Melbourne, and my eyes, ears, and mouth are filled with dirt and cobble stones. However, we saw nothing of the city, for such clouds of dust filled the air that we had to hire a boy with a lantern to lead us home. Hand me the bottle, for I'm famished for want of a drink."

While he was filling his glass, he ran on, talking about half a dozen subjects, and it was not until Smith asked the result of the interview, that he would be quiet enough to listen to my communication.

"I have arranged every thing," I said. "We are to use the rifles, and meet to-morrow morning early."

"And did you make no attempts at a reconciliation?" demanded Smith, reproachfully.

"Don't answer that question, Jack," Fred said, seriously. "I placed my life and honor in your hands, and I am satisfied that you dealt with me as though I were a brother."

I grasped his extended hand, and for a few moments we sat thus, without exchanging a word, both buried in thought and conjuring up reminiscences of the past, when a few months before we had left Boston to search for gold in California, and then, actuated by a spirit of adventure, had emigrated to Australia, still cherishing the hope of returning home with riches and with honor.

"I shall write a few letters to-day, Jack," Fred said, at length. "One of them will be addressed to you, and if any thing should happen you will find full directions how to dispose of the few things which I own."

"Let me meet the man," blubbered Smith. "I'm of no account, and if killed, shan't be missed, while both of you have something to live for."

"It cannot be," replied Fred. "I insulted the gentleman, and to me alone does he look for redress. God knows I do not desire the man's blood, and still hope that I shall not be forced to spill it."

"At least promise that I may accompany you to the field?" Smith said.

His request was readily complied with; but all day long Smith's face seemed as though he had lost his only friends.

The day wore away slowly. We dined with Murden, and chatted gayly about old times, and congratulated him on an addition which had been made to his pay, owing to the capture of bushrangers which had been effected by his command. We hardly touched our lips to the wine which he freely circulated; and at an early hour took our leave, much to his surprise, and without his suspecting the business which was to occupy our attention in the morning.

We went to bed early, leaving Smith to wake us at a suitable hour in the morning, which he promised to do, as he declared he felt too nervous to sleep. Sure enough, daylight was just stealing along the eastern horizon when we were called and found a steaming pot of hot coffee upon the table, which the careful stockman had prepared for us previous to our leaving for the field.

We drank our coffee in solemn silence, and then started for the rendezvous, Smith carrying the rifles and ammunition, and uttering comments at every step at the folly of our proceedings. Just as we locked

the door, the old cracked bell upon the church, near the villa of our friend, struck the hour of four. Finding that we had plenty of time, we walked along quite leisurely, meeting only a few people, and those longshoremen, who were hurrying to their work on the quays, and fearful of being late.

No one paid any attention to us, for the carrying of arms in Melbourne was common in those days; and so without remark we gained the crossing, and then continuing on for a short distance, entered an open space, far enough from the road to escape observation, and there awaited our adversaries.

We did not have to wait long. A carriage containing three persons stopped within gunshot of where we stood, and presently we saw Merriam and his friend, and a short, fat gentleman in an undress uniform, carrrying a small box under his arm, advance towards us.

Lieutenants Wattles and Merriam were smoking, and appeared perfectly cool and unconcerned regarding the result. We heard the old gentleman, whom we presumed to be the surgeon, remonstrating at something that did not appear to please him, and from what we could overhear, we found that he disapproved of the use of cigars at so early an hour in the morning.

"Ah, the divil, smile, will ye, at what I say, but it's poor Harris, of the thirty-sixth, who had cause to regret it. A finer officer the queen never had; and yet he would disarrange his nerves by the use of tobacco at an early hour in the morning, and what was the consequence? Killed at ten paces by a fellow who hardly ever saw a pistol before. Its truth I'm spaking, and ye well know it."

The doctor's companions did not pay much attention to his remarks, for they continued to smoke perfectly unconcerned, and while they were advancing slowly towards us we could hear the Irish surgeon lecturing them for their want of generalship.

"It's a pretty mess ye're in now, and the devil thank ye. The young fellows are on the ground afore us, and that don't look like fear, and by the same token, they have got their murderous-looking instruments with them. Bad luck to it, couldn't ye manage somewhat differently than to want to fight two Americans, who were born wid rifles in their hands."

Wattles made a reply, but it was too low and indistinct for us to hear, and the next moment the party were within speaking distance.

The principals raised their caps and then walked one side, while Merriam and myself shook hands, and then I was introduced to the surgeon, Doctor Michael O'Haraty, a genuine specimen of an Irish gentleman.

"We arranged the distance yesterday, and there is nothing to be settled but who shall give the word," Merriam said.

"Don't let that bother your brains, for I'll do that without the asking. Ah, it's many a signal I've given, and sometimes they've bin fatal ones, too," the doctor said.

I agreed to that, and then calling Smith, I desired Merriam to make choice of the rifle which he liked best. He was some time selecting, but at length hit upon mine, thus leaving Fred at liberty to use his own weapon.

"I use the same size balls that you do," I said, selecting one from some half a dozen that Smith held in his hand.

I carefully loaded Fred's rifle, and offered to assist Merriam, but he declined; and even when I told him that he had got a third more powder than was necessary, he did not heed my advice, and perhaps I was glad that he did not.

"Now, thin," cried the doctor, "do you take hold of this tape line, my man, and we'll measure off twenty rods in a jiffey."

Smith, who was appealed to, did as he was directed, and in a short time we had our men stationed and waiting for a signal which I longed for, yet dreaded.

Fred looked a shade paler, but he was as firm as a rock; and when I shook hands with him and handed him his rifle, I could not discover the least tremor of nerves, or any unusual agitation.

"If I should fall," Fred said, once more shaking me by the hand, "you will find in the letter which is directed to you, full instructions how to dispose of my effects. God bless you, Jack; I never loved you half as well as I do now."

I brushed away a tear, and with a voice choked by emotion asked if there was any thing which he wished to say before the word was given.

"I did think," he replied, examining his adversary's bearing, "that I would fire over his head; but I see that he is bent on mischief, and is determined to kill me, if possible. Under the circumstances I think that I shall do no great wrong if I touch him slightly."

"Do as you please," I replied, stepping back, and joining the doctor, who held a white handkerchief in one hand and his snuffbox in the other.

"Let me speak to Mr. Fred before you give the signal?" asked Smith.

"Not a word, my man," returned the doctor, regaling his nose with a pinch of snuff, and scanning the bearing of the men with evident delight.

"It's beautiful they look," murmured the doctor, in a low tone, and then elevating his voice, he continued, "the signal will be 'one, two, three,' and then, the dropping of this handkerchief. Mind, gentlemen, and reserve your fire until you see the handkerchief lave my hand. Now, thin, are ye ready?"

Wattles and Fred braced themselves as though expecting a shock, drew their caps a little more over their eyes, and signified that they were.

"One!" cried the doctor, in a loud voice.

The duellists brought their rifles to their shoulders, fully cocked.

"Two!" exclaimed the doctor.

The rifles were levelled, and eager eyes glanced along the tubes.

"Three!"

For a second after the word was spoken the doctor held the white handkerchief aloft; but as it slowly fell towards the ground, there was but one report, so closely did they fire together.

I had not taken my eyes from Fred, and to my joy I saw that he did not move. I glanced towards Wattles. He had dropped his rifle and was rubbing his right arm, which hung down powerless by his side.

"By the mass," cried the doctor, grabbing his box of instruments and running towards his brother officer, "the Americans have got the best of this fight, as I knew they would with their d——d rifles. But, by Saint Patrick, it was illegantly done, and that I'll stick to as long as I live."

CHAPTER XX.

Preparations for the Search for Gulpin's buried Treasures.

I started to congratulate Fred, but, quick as were my movements, I found that Smith had taken the lead, and was shaking hands with him at a tremendous rate.

"Are you injured?" I asked, running my eye over his form to see if I could discover any signs of blood.

"No, thank Heaven, I have escaped; although my adversary's bullet whizzed close over my head," replied Fred.

"I knew that he was overcharging the rifle when loading it," I cried, delighted to think that Merriam had done so.

"It was the means, perhaps, of saving my life, for the fellow aimed with good intentions, and I saw by the expression of his face that he was bound to hit me if possible."

"Well, since you are safe, I'll run and see how your adversary is doing," I said, glancing towards the doctor, who, with coat off, was kneeling on the ground, and wiping away blood with a cloth which he had taken from his mysterious box.

"Do so," replied Fred, "and if I can be of any assistance, let me know; I have no enmity against the man, and should really like to shake hands with him before parting."

I ran to the spot where Wattles was lying on the ground, and found him looking very pale and weak. Merriam and the doctor had ripped off the sleeve of his coat, and torn off the arm of his shirt; and while one was making bandages, the other was cleaning a ragged looking wound, just above the elbow of the right arm.

"If I can be of any service, doctor, I will assist you," I said, in a half-hesitating way, for I feared that they might consider it an intrusion.

"Sarvice, my dear boy?" echoed the doctor, stopping to look up for a moment from his work. "Of course ye can be of sarvice. Stoop down here and lind me a helpin' hand by straightening out the arm a bit, so that I can see if the bones are smashed, or only one broken."

I readily complied with the request, and the doctor continued,—

"There's no raison in the world for ye to be inemies now. Your friend has had a pop at the lieutenant here, and, I'm sorry to say, he's got the worse of it, although it's about time, for Wattles has been mighty lucky in these things, and was hardly ever hit afore."

Here the wounded man opened his eyes, and uttered a suppressed

groan; whether at the recollection of his numerous duels, or because the doctor wrenched his arm, is more than I can tell.

"Ah, man, don't groan, for it's only a broken arm ye have; but I'll tell ye privately that it's yer life it would have been, had the American been disposed to take it, for a divil a fear but he put the bullet jist where he intended. I saw, the instant he raised the rifle, that it was only a flesh wound he wished, and that he didn't know whether to pop ye on the right or left arm. Here, swallow that, and see if it don't put the life into ye, and make ye open yer eyes and sing psalms."

The doctor emptied a teaspoonful of cordial into the wounded man's mouth, and its strength must have been very beneficial, for he opened his eyes, a healthy color came to his face, and he spoke without any painful effort.

"Ah, a divil a fear is there of ye now, and if I can save the arm, ye'll be at it again in less than six months," muttered the doctor, as he applied a balm to the wound, and then covered it with lint.

"There is no fear of that, is there, doctor?" asked Wattles, who was a youngster not more than twenty-two years of age.

"I'll do all that I can; but rifle bullets are different intirely than pistol balls. It's many's the good wound I've cured made by the latter, and well ye knows it, Wattles; but who'd have suspected ye of fighting with murdering rifles?"

The young officer made no reply, and the doctor, tearing a piece of linen cloth into strips about two inches wide, continued working and talking at the same time.

The bandages were all tied on, and Smith had been sent after the driver of the carriage to tell him to bring his vehicle as near as possible, so that the wounded man could enter without exerting himself to walk. While we were waiting, Wattles looked at me, and a grim smile crossed his face, as he said,—

"Your friend is in luck to-day, sir."

"If you think that he considers it luck because you are wounded, you are mistaken," I replied.

"He had the advantage in the use of a weapon with which he is accustomed, and therefore I did not expect a favorable result. Had we used pistols, he would now be occupying my place."

"Ah, have done with your boasting, lieutenant, and think no more of the quarrel. Ye challenged the gentleman, and he accepted and chose his weapons; and it's mighty lucky ye may think yourself to get off with life, for he could have killed ye as easily as a kangaroo. It's myself that knows he could have done it," said the surgeon, warmly.

"Is that so?" asked Wattles, turning to me for confirmation.

"He could have killed you, had he been so disposed, even at twice the distance," I replied.

The lieutenant looked sober and thoughtful for a moment, when, thinking to make an impression, and get him to drop the quarrel forever, I continued,—

"My friend did contemplate firing over your head, and would have done so had not your looks convinced him that you intended mischief."

"By the Lord, I aimed for a vital part, but am glad that I missed

my object. Ask your friend to shake hands with me. From all accounts I'm convinced that he is a gentleman to cherish and know."

"Ah, Wattles, divil fear ye but yer heart is in the right place, afther all," cried the doctor, delighted at the proposed reconciliation.

I told Fred the request of his adversary, and without a moment's hesitation he joined the group, and extended his hand to the wounded man.

"You have got the best of me, sir," Wattles said, faintly, his pain beginning to grow excessive.

"I trust that it is a mere gun-shot wound, and that you will soon be well," replied Fred.

"I don't know — I don't know," moaned the lieutenant. "It seems as though the doctor would kill me with his cursed probing and punching. Half of it is unnecessary, I believe."

"Do you hear that?" cried O'Haraty, appealing to us, in astonishment. "It's like an infant I've treated him, and now ye see how he abuses me."

"Excuse me, doctor," replied the lieutenant, faintly, "but I hardly know what I am saying, I feel so weak. Get me into the carriage as quick as possible, and take me to the barracks where I can be quiet."

"We'll do that, Wattles; but it's a great pity that you don't know who your friends are. Come along with yer carriage, ye blackguard, and don't stop there looking behind ye, as though ye were a light-house."

The latter portion of the doctor's remarks was addressed to the driver of the vehicle, who, instead of paying any attention to the words of O'Haraty, was gazing, with an anxious glance, towards the city.

"What is the spalpeen looking at?" demanded the doctor, angrily. "Come here with the horses, and waste no more time."

"I see a cloud, as though a party of horse was galloping this way, and kicking up a dust. I'm suspicious that it's the police, and divil a bit do I want to be put into limbo for being concerned in the duel," cried the driver, making preparations to turn his horses.

"Are ye certain that it's the police?" demanded O'Haraty, eagerly.

"Yes, I'm certain; for now I can see over the bushes, and distinguish their blue coats. Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. I'm off, sure."

The fellow turned his animals' heads, and started towards the opening, but a loud threat from O'Haraty caused him to stop for a moment — and only for a moment.

"Curse ye for a cowardly villain!" yelled the doctor. "If yer don't stop this instant, I'll drive a piece of cold lead through yer thick skull."

He drew from his breast pocket a rifle pistol as he spoke, and aimed it at the runaway.

The driver looked over his shoulder, and seemed half inclined to obey, but the sound of approaching horses stirred him into life. He struck his animals a smart blow with his whip, and they sprang forward; but as they did so, the doctor raised his pistol, sighted hastily, and fired.

The fellow's hat fell to the ground, and with a yell of triumph at his

lucky escape, the driver continued on, and in a few minutes would have been beyond reach; but just at that instant my noble dog — the hound which I had left under lock and key at Smith's house — bounded towards me and covered my face with his kisses.

A lucky thought occurred to me; I glanced at Wattles, and saw that he had fainted from exhaustion and pain, and that it was certain death for him to be exposed to the hot rays of the sun for any length of time, so I determined to save him at any hazard.

"Here, Rover," I said, calling to the dog, and pointing to the retreating carriage, "seize him, good dog — seize him," I shouted.

The animal did not hesitate for an instant. With a mighty bound he cleared over twenty feet of the distance which separated him from the object which I had called his attention to, and almost before I could think, he seized the near horse by the throat, and brought him heavily to the ground. The driver rose from his seat and plied his whip with desperate energy, in hopes of beating the dog off, but such was the agility of Rover that not a blow reached him, and while his attention was thus occupied, O'Haraty stole forward, grasped the man by the leg, dragged him to the ground, and commenced to beat him unmercifully, mingling his blows with such exclamations as —

"Lave us, would ye? May the divil saze ye, ye mane thief of the world. Whin I hired ye to tend us and behave like a dacent man, ye up and cuts, jist because me friend gets a scratch on his arm."

"The police are coming," roared the fellow, rendered desperate by his beating.

"Let them come, if they will, but ye shan't go," cried the doctor, sitting astride of his fallen foe and glancing at Fred and I in triumph, while the perspiration streamed down his face in torrents.

"I saw the police trotting down the road," yelled the fallen man.

"Who calls the police?" cried a deep-toned voice near at hand.

I knew the speaker well, although I confess that it started me to hear him so unexpectedly, and looking up I saw that Murden sat on his horse, a few paces off, calmly surveying the strange group before him. At a short distance were six of his men, also mounted and drawn up in line awaiting their chief's solution of the difficulty.

"I think that my presence is needed here if you intend to murder that fellow, doctor," Murden said, good naturedly, addressing O'Haraty, who kept his position, looking somewhat foolish at being caught.

"The mane scamp," began the doctor, when Murden checked him.

"What is the cause of the gathering, and why do I find an officer of her majesty, lying on the ground wounded and insensible?"

"Why, the fact of it is, Mr. Officer," Merriam began, but apparently afraid of the consequences, he stopped and looked hard towards the doctor, as though asking him to take up the answer and carry it through in the best manner possible.

"O, the divils," roared the doctor, rising from his seat, much to the relief of the driver, who apparently thanked God that he was rid of such an incumbrance.

"O, the spalpeens," continued O'Haraty, shaking his fist at an imaginary enemy a long distance off. "O, if there is law to be had in the

land we'll pursue ye wid not only the police force, but the whole army, and then we'll see if ye are so bold."

"What is the matter, doctor?" asked Murden, who I thought suspected what had taken place, and was disposed to overlook it, yet not a word of recognition had he bestowed upon Fred and myself, so we kept in the background.

"Matter?" yelled the doctor, apparently desperately angry; "why, here's me friends and myself out for a bit of a walk and to kill a kangaroo or two, when a party of sneaking bushrangers ups and fires at us, and down tumbles Wattles, shot in the arm quite nately. It's chase we gave to the villains, but run they did, and when we came back we found that this scamp was disposed to escape to Melbourne and lave us to foot it back to the city."

"Indeed! Pray which way did they go?" asked Murden, not moving a muscle of his face.

"Over the hill, there. Ride quick, and I think it's prisoners they'll be in no time," cried the doctor.

"Did you count how many there were?" asked the police officer.

"Count them? How the divil could we, there were so many?" replied O'Haraty.

"O, then if the bushrangers were in such force, it's surprising they should run from only six men. I thought better of their courage," and a sarcastic smile stole over Murden's face as he watched the doctor's companion.

"Well, well," stammered O'Haraty, "if ye had heard us shout, ye would have thought we could have frightened the divil himself."

"Well, whether Wattles was wounded by a bushranger or a companion, it will do him no good to remain here in the hot sun. Place him carefully into the carriage and drive to the barracks. I'll follow shortly, and continue my investigation of this mysterious affair."

Murden spoke like one accustomed to be obeyed. The driver of the carriage, who hardly moved two steps without keeping his eyes on the dog — the animal appearing to have some strong antipathy against him — readily lent his aid, and with Smith's assistance the wounded lieutenant was propped up on a seat, and the doctor stowed his corpulent person alongside of him,

"Why did you not tell me of this yesterday?" asked Murden, beckoning to me, and whispering in a low tone.

"Because we were fearful that you would interrupt the proceedings," I replied.

"I certainly should have done so. Are you aware that Wattles is a most experienced and successful duellist? That he has been out half a dozen times, and always came off without so much as a scratch?"

"No, I was not aware that such is the case," I answered.

"He is all that I tell you, and if I had suspected that a duel was to come off between Fred and the soldier, I should have had both of them arrested and locked up, and kept them until they were ready to swear that they would not lift their hands against each other."

"And then Fred and myself would have been imputed as informers, and a stain would have rested on our reputations, and we should no longer have been considered fit company for gentlemen."

"That does not necessarily follow," answered Murden. "No one who knows you both can call you aught but brave men."

"But did we not dine with you after we had received the challenge? We made no secret of our going — hundreds saw us enter your house, and hundreds saw us depart. Had we but lisped a word of our intended doings, it would have been said that we visited you on purpose. Come, look at the matter in a sensible light, and you will take a different view of the affair."

Murden shook his head as if he considered it not only a breach of the law but a breach of friendship to fight a duel without his knowledge; and he intended to reply, but the doctor poked his jolly looking face from the window of the carriage, and bade us good-by, and requested the pleasure of our company to dinner on the next day.

"And do you come too, Murden. I've a few bottles of the rale Irish whiskey, and better cannot be found in the world, and if ye come I'll brew a jug of punch that'll make ye think ye are in paradise after drinking a few tumblers. Good-by, boys, and, Murden, keep a sharp look out for the bushrangers."

The driver started his horses, and for a few minutes after the carriage had left the field we could hear the mellow voice of the doctor laughing at the idea of his quizzing the police lieutenant with his story about bushrangers.

"Come and breakfast with us," I said, turning to Murden. "We cannot celebrate the escape of our friend Fred in a more appropriate manner."

"Agreed," he cried; and then turning to his men, he said, "return to the station and report that Lieutenant Wattles was severely injured this morning by the accidental discharge of his rifle while hunting kangaroos. If I am wanted you know where to find me."

"Pray, how came you on the road so early?" I asked Murden.

"Because I got wind that there was trouble between you and Wattles. One of my men overheard Fred's remark, the other night, and then he saw Merriam leaving your house, and putting all and all together — the fact that your party were early on the road, and Wattles being seen in a carriage — he considered it of sufficient importance to report to me, which he did an hour too late this morning, while I was dreaming of bushrangers and prize money."

"But how did you find us, and how came the dog loose?" I inquired.

"That is a secret, but I don't mind telling you. I rode to your house and tried the door. It was locked, but I heard the hound making an awful howling within; so I just fitted a key to the lock, and opened the door, and was nearly knocked down by the dog, who thought his master had returned. However, Rover, after his disappointment, received me with a wag of his tail, and then, after snuffing around for a moment, started in a trot towards the field we have just left. We followed close to his tail, and then the trot became a gallop — the gallop a run, and to save our distance we drew our reins, and jogged along, keeping a good lookout on both sides of the road; but I believe that we should have missed you had not the report of your pistol given us token of your whereabouts."

Chatting thus in an old familiar manner, we reached "Smith's villa,"

as we called it, and prepared for breakfast, a meal we were ready to enjoy, as our early rising had sharpened our appetites.

"By the way," cried Murden, suddenly, "your portion of the money due for the capture and death of the bushrangers will be paid whenever you are disposed to call for it."

"How much does it amount to?" I asked.

"Why, for you three, I think near two thousand pounds. That of course includes Black Darnley and his gang."

"Most ten thousand dollars!" cried Fred, surprised at the large amount.

"I wish, with all my heart, it was twice the sum. Join me, and in less than two months we will have a bill against the treasurer which will cause him to look wild."

"We can't spend our time hunting men," replied Fred, "when there is so much gold in the earth that we have only to dig to obtain it. As to the rewards which are offered for captured bushrangers, I must own that I feel none too willing to accept that which is due to me, without striving to earn more. It looks to me as though we were only butchers and dealers in human blood."

"If we were the only ones who ever accepted of rewards for murderers and thieves, I might be induced to respect your conscientious scruples," replied Murden, with a laugh. "But as it has been the custom from time immemorial for rewards to be offered for shedders of human blood, and many men whose respectability cannot be questioned have received rewards for services so rendered, I think that I shall pocket my share, and consider all three of you very weak and spleeny not to do the same."

Murden swallowed his coffee with a dogmatical air, as though his arguments were unanswerable, and shortly took his leave, after making us promise to breakfast with him the next day, and go and draw the money which was awaiting our orders.

We studied over the subject for some time after Murden had gone, and hardly knew how to proceed. Smith was consulted, and was willing to abide by our decision, at the same time he did not scruple to inform us that his last trip, owing to the treatment his cargo had received from the bushrangers, was a most disastrous one; but still he had a few thousand pounds which he could place his hand upon, and should commence purchasing another load immediately, as every day lost was money out of pocket. We then considered it a fitting time to speak to the stockman about the business we were desirous of entering upon. We told him of the confession of Jim Gulpin, and the determination to which we had come to search for the buried treasure.

He listened attentively, and then pledged his word to aid us with all of his ability. He would make no bargain concerning his team and labor, but agreed to let his promised reward depend upon the success with which we met. If nothing was found, we would continue on our way to the mines, and were welcome to his labor and time. If we succeeded we might give him what we pleased.

We closed with him immediately, and contributed money to buy provisions and luxuries which we never dreamed of buying on our first passage. Smith was also directed to purchase a tent for our use, shovels

and pickaxes, and three or four boxes of claret — a perfect luxury in a warm climate — and a number of articles which we desired for a residence in the mines.

We also wanted three good saddle horses, but found that our funds would be greatly reduced by the purchase, and after a short debate we determined in council that necessity compelled us to accept of the money paid for the capture of the bushrangers, and after that question was decided we felt that a great load was removed from our minds, and that we began to look upon it as a mere matter of business.

CHAPTER XXII.

Departure from Melbourne. — Fight with the Natives.

During the following week we were busy, visiting; dining with one, and supping with another, yet we were obliged to decline many pressing invitations, and offered as an excuse, our speedy departure for the mines.

Through the kindness of Murden, we were enabled to purchase three excellent horses, saddles, &c., which belonged to the police department.

The animals were just what we wanted, for they were quick in their actions, and had been taught to stand motionless while firing guns or pistols from their backs. We were enabled to buy them, owing to a surplus of horses which the department owned, and had no use for.

Our hardest task was when, on the evening of the seventh day after Fred had met the officer in mortal combat, Smith yoked his oxen, attached them to a moderately filled cart, and declared he was ready for a start.

Murden, Wattles, Merriam, Doctor O'Haraty, and a dozen others, whose acquaintance we had cultivated during our brief residence in Melbourne, were assembled at "Smith's villa," and came to say farewell.

"You heard the word, gentlemen," said Fred; "our leader says that he is ready, and we must not detain him. We wish to place twenty-five miles between us and Melbourne before morning, and to do so requires an early start. The next time we meet, I hope that our days will not be limited. In the mean time, if any one present should visit Ballarat, don't fail to make our tent his home."

"Ballarat be blessed!" growled O'Haraty; "the idea of two dacent, sinsible people digging for gold, when there's so much can be had without work."

"I have only my left hand to offer you," said Wattles, presenting it to Fred, "but my grasp is as friendly and sincere as though both were free."

"Your arm is improving?" inquired Fred, who had not seen his adversary before, since the morning of the meeting.

"Thanks to the doctor, and your kindness in not aiming at a more vulnerable part, I shall soon be well. Do we separate as friends?"

"I say yes, with all my heart," cried Fred, eagerly.

Some one locked the door of "Smith's villa," and handed him the key, and then once more bidding good-by, the oxen were started, and in company with Murden, we soon reached the outskirts of the city.

It was past dusk when our friend, the police lieutenant, drew rein, and decided to return to the city We allowed Smith to continue on, while we stopped and chatted for a few moments.

Murden appeared sad at parting, and more than once he declared that he wished he was to accompany us, for now that we were to leave him, he should have no one who would enter into his adventures with the same degree of interest which we had shown.

"There is one question which we wish to ask, Murden," I said, a few minutes before he left us.

"Name it," he replied.

"How many of the bushrangers whom we captured have been condemned to death?"

"Why do you ask?" he inquired.

"Because you know that we have not been able to obtain any information on the subject. A select few were admitted to see them; but they had no formal trial, that I am aware of."

"You are right, they had no formal trial, and they did not deserve one. The examination was secret, and even now not more than fifty people in Melbourne know that the bushrangers are dangling by their necks in the prison yard.

"All?" I cried, surprised at the secrecy which had been maintained.

"Not a man is now alive. They rightly merited their fate, for their careers were stained with cruel crimes; and may God forgive them, for man would not."

Murden wrung our hands, and the next instant he was galloping swiftly towards Melbourne.

We resumed our journey, feeling somewhat saddened by the intelligence which we had received; yet we felt that we had only done our duty in assisting in the arrest of the robbers, and with this conviction, we tried to banish the thoughts of their death.

We soon overtook Smith, who was mounted like ourselves, and through the night we jogged along by his side, relieving the loneliness of the journey with stories and reminiscences of our other expeditions.

It was just about daylight, on the morning of the fifth day from Melbourne, and we were pressing the oxen to their utmost to reach a camping ground before sunrise, when Rover, who had been jogging far in advance of us, stopped suddenly before a thick clump of bushes, which extended some ways along the roadside, and with an angry howl, remained regarding some object which was concealed from our sight.

I called the animal, but he refused to move, and I began to suspect that some kind of beast was concealed among the brush, and that he was too formidable for the dog to attack alone. With this view, Fred and myself unslung our rifles and examined the caps, and rode slowly forward. We were not more than ten rods from the hound when we saw a spear whiz past him, and enter the bushes on the other side of

the road. We then knew what was concealed; but whether the purpose was hostile or friendly, we did not have an opportunity to ask, for we had barely time to call the dog from such a dangerous locality, when another spear passed near our heads.

"Turn back!" shouted Smith, who was jogging on with the cattle, a few rods distant, and saw the whole transaction. "Turn back," he continued, "or you are dead men."

We wheeled our horses and galloped from a place where nothing but spear heads were to be seen, for we did not like the idea of fighting people who ran no risk.

When we joined Smith, we found that he had turned his oxen, and was driving them at full speed towards an open plain half a mile distant.

"Are you going back to Melbourne?" asked Fred.

"I am going to gain yonder plain as fast as possible," the stockman cried, casting an uneasy glance over his shoulder, as though fearful of pursuit.

"For what reason?" we asked.

"Because I've no idea of risking my life by running an ambush, where, no doubt, twenty or thirty natives are stationed, determined to kill the first one who passes."

"I thought they were harmless," I replied.

"So they are, when they choose to be; but it's very probable that miners have been committing outrages upon their women, and now they are determined to revenge their injuries upon us. Keep your eyes upon the bushes, and don't mind me if you see signs of their following. Escape to the open plain, and trust to me to join you. Once there, we can hold fifty of them at bay."

"Do you think we are so cowardly as to desert a comrade?" demanded Fred. "Let them attack us if they will, but we will stick to you and the team as long as life remains."

"I expected the answer," cried Smith, applying his long whip to the sides of the reeking cattle, and starting them into a run. "But if you will not save yourselves, at least take care of the oxen and let me cover the retreat."

"Do you think they will dare to follow us?" I asked.

"Here is your answer," cried the stockman; and as he spoke a slim poled spear whistled within an inch of my head, and passed out of sight, far to the other side of the road.

"And here goes my reply," exclaimed Fred, who held his rifle in his hand ready for use.

He raised it, and hardly took time to sight a naked, black body, which was visible for a moment before he fired.

A yell of bodily pain followed the explosion, and for a moment we could hear a great commotion among the bushes, and then all was still.

"Help me to urge the cattle forward," shouted Smith. "Now is our time to escape, while the devils are with the wounded imp."

We were about to comply, when a club, about three feet long, flew over our heads, touched the ground in advance of the cattle, bounded from the earth, and came towards us with undiminished velocity.

"Look out for their boomerangs," shouted Smith, and we dodged

our heads in time to save them from a blow that would have unhorsed us.

That was the first time we made the acquaintance of the most skilful weapon in use by the natives. They throw the boomerang with unerring precision, and had we not heard of the manner of its working, and been apprised of the necessity of avoiding its flight, by the warning voice of Smith, one of us would have made a meal for an Australian native that morning.

The boomerang is a piece of hard wood about three feet long, slightly curved in the form of a bow; and when a native wishes to strike an object, he does not throw his weapon directly at it, but from it, and by some unexplained principle of retrogradation, the boomerang touches the ground, and then flies with great force directly at whatever it is aimed. I have seen the natives exhibit their proficiency a hundred different times — and the more I saw of the game, the more I became bewildered at the science displayed.

We did not stop to fight an unseen enemy, but continued our headlong course, and at length had the pleasure of reaching an open space where we could wait the approach of those disposed to attack us, although whether they would venture to make a demonstration on the plain was uncertain.

Smith, however, was determined to be prepared for the worst. He unyoked his cattle, but instead of turning them loose, when they soon would have fallen a prey to the rapacious appetites of the natives, he grouped them around the cart, and chained them, to prevent their flight in case of an attack. By this method they served as a shield to us, and did not interfere with our rifle practice.

We had no sooner got our arrangements completed, than a dozen or twenty of the filthy-looking wretches — naked, with the exception of a mat around their hips — appeared at the edge of the bushes, and seemed to survey our disposition of the order of battle. Two or three of them, self-elected leaders, apparently wished for an immediate assault; but we could see that the proposition met with no approval from the mass, and the motions were made towards the men, as though to wait until night time.

"We shall have a sleepless night, and must be prepared for the black devils' mischief," Smith said, surveying the force and comprehending their meaning.

"Do they often attack teams?" we asked of Smith, who, now that his cattle were safe, had regained all of his cuteness and colloquial powers.

"During all my freighting to the mines, this is only the second time the scamps have manifested hostility. Once I got clear by giving them an ox, and thought I got off quite cheap at that. But this time they appear to be serious; and if we get clear with a whole skin, may think ourselves lucky. Some team ahead of us must have trespassed on their rights in an outrageous manner to render them as rebellious as they are."

"I have a great mind to try the range of my rifle," Fred said. "I think that I can send a ball into their midst, and make them scatter to the bushes, instead of standing there and quarrelling among themselves."

Smith measured the distance with his eye and shook his head.

"It's over a half mile," he said, "and I never yet saw the shooting iron that could do damage at such a distance."

"Then look at one for the first time;" and as Fred spoke, he sighted a native, who appeared desirous of making an immediate attack, for he was gesticulating in the most absurd manner, and shaking his long spear at us as though trying to get at close quarters, where he could do instant execution.

The act of Fred was observed, and a yell of defiance greeted his hostile attitude. Before it had died away, the sharp report of the rifle drowned their shrill screams, and then the conspicuous native, who had flourished his spear so threateningly, threw up his arms, and with a most unearthly yell, fell to the ground.

In an instant not a native, with the exception of the wounded one, was to be seen, and a stranger would hardly have supposed that the clump of bushes near us contained a couple of dozen human beings, who were watching every motion which we made, and speculating as to the best mode of putting us to death, and sharing the goods and provisions loaded upon the cart.

"An American rifle forever," shouted Smith, who suspended his work of getting out a water keg, containing eighteen or twenty gallons, which he had taken the precaution to fill with water and place upon the cart, so that his animals and companions need not suffer with thirst during the long stretch across the prairies.

"A few more such shots as that and the black devils will retire in disgust, and we shall have the road free," Smith continued, with an admiring look at his American friend.

"There is no use in wasting our powder by firing at random, and until the natives show themselves I shall rest, so as to be able to keep my eyes open to-night."

Under the shadow of the cart Fred spread his blanket, and after assisting Smith to water the cattle, and taking a good drink myself, I joined him, and left Rover and the stockman to keep guard.

We slept until dark, and, upon awakening, found that Smith had joined us, and left the whole responsibility of giving warning, if the natives approached, to the dog. The latter, however, was worth a dozen men for such a purpose, and we commended Smith for his sagacity in securing rest before the time arrived when we knew that demonstration would be made against our encampment.

We gathered some dried grass and made a fire, sufficient to boil a teakettle, and then deliberately prepared a dish of coffee, not knowing but that it would be our last. After we had concluded our supper we examined our rifles and revolvers, found them in good order, and then carefully reviewing the animals so that it was impossible for them to get loose without cutting their fastenings, we took up our positions at an equal distance apart, and in a circle outside of the cattle.

Rover placed himself by my side, and looked into my face as much as to say that he understood all that was going on, and hoped that he was to be trusted with any important business which might come before us.

The night wore slowly away. Sleep we did not, for the insects were

so troublesome that it seemed as though we inhaled them at every breath. They filled the air and dashed their dry wings in our faces while flitting over our heads, and their eternal buzzing was like the murmuring of a distant waterfall.

I judged that it was near two o'clock, and at the period when sleep is the strongest, that my attention became riveted upon the singular movements of some animal which appeared to be feeding upon the withered grass which covered the plain. Sometimes it moved near enough to allow me to almost discern what it was, and then it would recede and be lost from sight for a few minutes, to again appear and approach nearer than at first.

Rover appeared to be as deeply interested in the animal as myself, for his eyes glowed like balls of fire as he watched the movements of the strange nondescript, and appeared to wonder why I did not tell him to investigate the matter instead of sitting there with staring eyes.

Presently a second and then a third animal came in sight, and their movements were like that of the first. Slowly and in an irregular line they approached me, halting every two or three seconds as though feeding upon the grass, which was rank and tasteless, and at length I came to the conclusion that they were animals peculiar to Australia, and such as I had not seen before.

"Smith," I said, calling to that worthy man, who, I thought, was nodding in a mysterious manner.

"Well," he answered, rubbing his eyes and trying to appear as though he had not thought of sleeping on his post.

"What kind of animals are these within a rod of the camp, feeding so quietly?"

When I spoke and pointed to them, I was astonished to find that, during the short time my attention was occupied, half a dozen others were in sight, but they were no longer feeding — they appeared to be surprised at the sound of a human voice, and were listening attentively.

"Why, hang it, man, do you mean to say that you don't know a kangaroo when you see one?" and Smith laughed at my greenness.

"Do you mean to say that those are kangaroos?" I demanded.

"Of course they are; see that fellow sitting on his tail near you. He is almost as large as a native, and were it not for showing the black devils our position I would knock him over, and we would have fresh steaks for breakfast."

"But I supposed that the kangaroo was a very wild animal," Fred said, joining in the conversation.

"So they are; but in the night time I have known them to mingle with horses and not leave until daylight. They appear to have a remarkable attachment for horses; and a man riding over a prairie can approach them within a few rods without exciting suspicions."

I was listening attentively to Smith, but still I kept an eye on our visitors, and noticed that they gradually lessened their distance between us, and were so near that they could not fail to note our positions.

"Do kangaroos usually carry spears in their paws?" I asked of Smith, in a whisper.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean that instead of animals we have natives to deal with, and in another moment our throats would have been cut by the sly scamps."

I snatched up my rifle, and hardly waiting to place it at my shoulder, fired.

The kangaroo, alias a native sewed up in a skin, sprang towards me, but with a yell of agony fell dead at my feet.

I seized my revolver, but before I could use it Fred's rifle and Smith's double-barrelled gun answered my lead, and two more natives were bleeding upon the field.

The smoke slowly drifted past, but no more live kangaroos were to be seen.

I looked for Rover, but he had disappeared during the firing, and he did not return for ten minutes, when by his panting I knew that he had pursued the natives to the bushes, but what other damage he had done the latter only knew.

"We shall rest in peace for the remainder of the night," Smith said, "that is, provided any one can get rest with so many blasted bugs buzzing in the air. The natives will not make a second attack upon us, you may be assured."

Smith's words were found to be correct, for, when daylight appeared, a flag of truce was sent to our camp, and an old native demanded permission to remove the bodies of his fallen friends. We gave a willing consent on condition that we were allowed to pass on our way without further molestation; and after accepting our terms, we detained the old fellow as a hostage until we were safe from their ambush, when we dismissed him with a number of presents, and he returned to his camp apparently delighted at his treatment.

We urged our cattle to their utmost exertions, and at sundown we were in sight of the old convict's hut, and in close proximity to the buried gold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Arrival at the old Stockman's Hut.—Mysterious Interruptions during the Hunt.

As we drew near the hut which had withstood so hot an assault from the gang of Jim Gulpin, we saw that its proprietor was seated before his door, busily engaged in reading a book, in which he appeared deeply interested, for he never raised his eyes until Rover, who recognized him, thrust his cold nose on his hand and demanded a welcome.

The old man looked surprised, dropped his book, and then apparently comprehended that we must be near, for he glanced eagerly round, and when his eyes fell upon Smith, he started towards us at a brisk pace, and in a few minutes the two were shaking hands like friends who had been separated for months and years.

"But where are your companions? Where are the two generous

Americans who fought so bravely when I revenged my daughter's injuries?" demanded the old man, who did not recognize us, dressed as we were in a respectable-looking thin suit of clothes, and with our beards shaven off.

"O," answered Smith, carelessly, "they became infatuated with the pleasures of Melbourne, and have remained behind."

"And our pardons?" asked the stockman, after a moment's silence, during which we could see that he was struggling for fortitude and composure.

"Here," exclaimed Fred, "a free and unconditional pardon is granted to convict No. 2921, subject only to the approval of the Home office, for distinguishing himself in an encounter with a gang of desperate bushrangers."

The old man knew his voice, and tears, which he had before suppressed, now flowed freely. He grasped Fred's hands and pressed them convulsively, and then fell upon me and nearly smothered me with his embrace.

"Read it again," he cried, handing the pardon to Fred. "Let me once more be assured that I am a free man."

Fred complied with his request, and was about to inquire concerning his daughter, when she made her appearance at the door of the hut, and appeared to be slightly astonished at seeing her father conversing with strangers.

"Come here, Becky," he cried, "I have news for you — great news."

Followed by the hound, who had sought her out a few moments before, she came to meet us; and being a more acute observer than her parent, she readily recognized us in spite of our change of costume.

"Here, Becky," cried the old man, with childish eagerness, "read that document that his excellency the governor has sent me. I am a free man, Becky — a free man, and can travel to any part of the island, and not a soldier or police officer can harm me, or lay the weight of his hand upon me, and ask why I leave my flocks without permission. I shall yet be rich, and instead of tending sheep I will own them, and have shepherds who will look to me for orders. I'll not be known as the shepherd convict, but the rich landed proprietor. O, I will show you, Becky, if it pleases God, how I will work, and you shall be a lady, and no longer dress in cheap stuff, but wear silks, and be waited upon. I know a thing or two which you little suspect."

"I am contented as I am, if I can but be near you, father," she answered, trying to check the old man's sudden energy.

"I know, I know; but we must bide our time, and remain poor for the present, Becky — only for the present."

"Perhaps our visitors would like supper," the young woman suggested, in hopes of turning the conversation.

"By all means; they shall have the best that we can give," replied the stockman, emerging from his deep reverie, and playing the host to perfection. "Cook them the hind quarter of the lamb I killed to-day, and add whatever else you may have in the house."

"But we object to that," said Fred. "We did not come here to rob you of your provisions, and while we have a full supply will not trespass upon your store. It is you whom we invite to share our supper.

Recollect we are just from Melbourne, and have a rare quality of tea in our cart which we want you and your daughter to test."

"There surely can be no harm in accepting of your offer," replied the old man, musingly. "When I am rich, it will of course be a different thing — then you can partake of my hospitality."

"If we proposed to you to help us to wealth, what answer should you return?" Fred asked of the convict.

"The answer of a grateful, honest man. Show me that the means to get the wealth are honest, and I will work without complaining, for months, and when you are satisfied with your share of worldly goods, I will seek to get mine," returned the old man, promptly.

"Then we ask your aid for the space of a few days. In yonder forest, a treasure is buried, and we expect that some work is required to find it. Will you aid us?"

"With all my heart," replied the stockman, without a moment's hesitation. "I am under too great an obligation to you, gentlemen, to refuse assistance in so small a matter. When shall we start?"

"To-morrow morning, at daylight. Time is precious to us until we find the treasure."

"I hope you will not be disappointed in your search," returned the old man, apparently restored to his usual clear-headedness with the prospect of something to do. "A secret like Gulpin's must have been known or suspected by others beside his band. For a few days past I have seen strange men wandering around the edge of the wood, although they did not appear to be regular bushrangers. They may have the same object in view as yourselves, but without your knowledge of the locality of the gold.

"If they are bushrangers we will fight them, but if honest people in search of the treasure, we will laugh at them for their pains, and ridicule them for their trouble," the old man continued. "I see that Smith and my daughter have managed to get something to eat. Suppose we have supper first, and discuss the best means of accomplishing your ends afterwards?"

"By the way, we forget to tell you that your share of money, for the capture of bushrangers, is awaiting your order," Fred said, during supper, speaking to the stockman.

"I feel content with the paper which contains my pardon, and think that I am amply rewarded. I desire nothing more from government."

Finding that the subject was distasteful to the old man, we said no more, but after the table was cleared away, we lighted our pipes and planned the business which was to occupy us early the next morning. Our arrangements were soon completed and agreed upon. We readily came to the conclusion to unload all of our baggage excepting what we should want while absent; and instead of taking eight oxen, we concluded to take only four, as that number could be provided for much easier than all of them. We also concluded to leave our horses, and let the old man's daughter keep her eyes on them during the day, and confine them in the enclosure which was used for herding sheep during the night.

With this idea, we began making our preparations for an early start. Our shovels and pickaxes were articles which we should want in digging,

and three days' provisions were also placed upon the cart, together with our bedding and mosquito bars to prevent the insects from eating us alive during our sleeping hours.

Our rifles were also examined, and at length satisfied that we were ready for an early start, we bid our host and daughter good night and retired to our usual sleeping place, under the cart, with Rover at our feet, ready to give notice of the slighest appearance of danger.

It was still dark when the stockman aroused us, but a pale light in the eastern heavens showed that day would soon break. Although we were tired with our long journey, yet we did not stand a second call, and in an hour's time after being aroused, we had despatched our hastily cooked breakfast, and were on the road and urging the cattle towards the dark and sombre appearing woods where the gang of Black Darnley had been signally defeated.

It was about eight o'clock when we reached the place where we had entered formerly. Every thing appeared as we had left it. The forest path seemed to have been untrodden since the day when we had made a funeral pile of the remains of the bushrangers, yet there was one peculiarity that struck me as rather odd — the entire absence of parrots, whose croakings used to attract our attention, and whose plumage, gaudy and varied, commanded our admiration.

While Smith unyoked the cattle and chained them to a tree, under which a good supply of grass was to be had, I took my rifle, and calling to Rover, started towards the bushrangers' camp, or rather where it had stood before we had given it to the flames.

I had not walked ten rods before I thought I saw the figure of a man glide from behind a tree and disappear in a thicket of brush. I stopped, and with rifle on the cock, waited for his re-appearance; but as I heard nothing from him, I concluded that I would beat up his quarters before the rest of my party came along.

I examined the thicket, and to my surprise, found that it was composed of a species of brier, with long, needle-like thorns upon every twig, and that the idea of a man's passing through it, unless dressed in armor, was impossible, as he would have been punctured in every pore, and would have shed blood at every step. I did not like to think that I had been subjected to an optical delusion, and so I continued on for a short distance, but could find no trail, although I observed that Rover snuffled around in an unusual manner, and appeared uneasy.

"Hullo," cried Fred, who had now entered the woods with the rest of the party, "what are you doing away from the path?"

I returned a trivial answer, and joined them in their walk towards the clearing; yet I felt as though I had not done my duty, and examined the mysterious disappearance of the shadow which I saw, with sufficient attention. A fear of ridicule and a dread of wasting time alone prevented me from speaking.

"The woods are unusually quiet," the stockman said, as we moved along in Indian file. "I never visited here without being provoked at the ceaseless chatter of the parrots, and yet to-day but few are to be heard and none seen. They have become shy, and an explanation would be satisfactory to account for the fact."

As no surmise was made by either of the party, the conversation

dropped, and it was not until we were standing over the half charred bones of the bushrangers, which had been pawed around by the fox-like animals of the woods, that we again spoke.

The ashes of the burned hut were still visible, so that its location was defined without trouble, but the great question to be solved was where the treasure lay buried. To determine this we had purchased an excellent pocket compass in Melbourne, and upon taking the bearings we found that the bushrangers were exactly in a south-west direction from where the hut stood.

"Now," said the old stockman, "repeat the exact words of Gulpin, when telling you of the buried money."

"Ten paces in a south ——," I replied, promptly.

"Nothing more?" he demanded.

"Not a syllable."

"Then let us set the compass and pace off the distance in a south-west line, and begin digging."

The ten paces were gravely gone through with, and I found that the grass where they terminated bore no indications of having been disturbed. I shook my head and expressed a decided opinion that no ground had been broken there for a year, at the least calculation. Fred was of my opinion, and began to have serious doubts of the truth of the story of Gulpin.

I was still hopeful, and glanced over the opening to see if I could discover signs of the earth having been recently disturbed. While I was thus occupied, Rover was scratching among the bones which were plentifully strewed around, and a sudden thought occurred to me. I consulted the compass, and was glad to find that my surmises were not contrary to the dying confession of Gulpin.

I paced off ten paces in a south-east direction, and the last step brought me exactly in the midst of the bones and ashes of the bushrangers.

I seized a spade and struck it into the ground, and was about to call my companions' attention to the spot, when a sharp report was heard near at hand, in the bushes, and a musket ball whizzed within two inches of my head.

We were all too much accustomed to life in the bush to remain in open ground when an unseen enemy was disposed to exercise his skill on one of us, so that in less than half a second's time we were under cover, and watching with tolerably sharp eyes for the first movement of the man who had attempted to riddle my carcass with his confounded bullet.

For half an hour we waited, and not a leaf stirred. The dog had ranged through the forest, and once, by his peculiar howl, we thought some mishap had befallen him, but beyond a few spots of blood on his nose, he appeared to be quite unharmed, and seemed anxious to again go in search of our enemy.

Fearful that his life would be endangered, I kept him near me, and for another half hour we waited, motionless, in anticipation of an attack, yet none came.

Presently I heard a slight noise behind me, and turning suddenly, with my rifle presented, I found that the muzzle was lodged against the head

of the stockman, who had been reconnoitring in the vicinity, and yet so quietly that I was not aware that he had left the bush under which he sought shelter.

"I have examined the bushes carefully, and no signs of a bushranger are to be seen," the old man said, laying the long gun which he was accustomed to use by his side, and brushing off a few specks of dust which had collected on the barrel.

"It is a mystery to me how he disappeared so soon after discharging his gun," I said.

The old man shook his head, and, laying one finger on my arm, whispered, —

"Do you believe in spirits?"

"Do you mean this kind?" I asked, drawing a flask of excellent whiskey from my pocket and offering him a drink.

"No, I didn't mean this kind," the stockman said, slowly raising it to his mouth, and I could hear the liquor coursing down his throat in a stream.

"No," he repeated, removing the bottle from his mouth, and drawing a long breath, "I didn't mean these kinds of spirits, because there's no harm in them, and the more a man gets the better he is off. I meant the kind of spirits which wander about the earth, and play tricks upon living men."

"Ah, a sort of ghost, I suppose you mean," I answered.

"Precisely," replied the stockman, mechanically taking the bottle from my hand and again applying it to his lips; "ghosts are the fellows — they do every thing without being seen; and why should not the spirit of Gulpin hover around this spot, and repel all attempts to get at his money?"

"I know of but two reasons," I replied, gently taking the bottle from my friend's hands, for fear that my share of its contents would be very meagre; "in the first place, ghosts usually don't care about money, as they have no use for it in the country in which they spend a large portion of their time."

"That's true," replied the man, making a dive to get the bottle in his possession, but I prevented this, by applying it to my own lips.

"In the next place," I continued, pausing to take breath, "fire, but not fire-arms is furnished to refractory spirits; and if I am any judge of worldly matters, it was a piece of lead that whizzed past my head half an hour ago."

"Then you don't believe that the sound which we considered the report of a gun was produced by evil spirits, who are set here to guard the treasure of Gulpin?"

"It is more likely a bushranger was secreted in the bushes, or behind the trees, and that when he aimed, he intended to make short work of one of us, in hope of frightening the remainder."

"Then give me another drink, and if the scamp wants a muss he can have one, for I'm not going to remain here, broiling under the hot sun, all day."

The old man snatched the flask from my hand, and before I could stop him, had nearly drained it of its contents. I discovered, for the first time, that day, that the stockman was no longer under self-control

when he had tasted liquor, and from that period until our acquaintance ceased I never again offered it to him.

I sought to restrain him, but in vain; with a fanatical yell he plunged into the clearing, and waving his long gun over his head, he dared spirit, ghost, or bushranger to meet him on even ground.

There was no response to his challenge, and considering that it was cowardly to let him remain there alone, the rest of us quickly gathered around, and requested him to lie down for a short time.

He repelled us with scorn, at the imputation that he was drunk; and finding that it was impossible to reason with him, we left him digging away as though for life, and throwing the dirt in the form of a parapet.

We separated and scoured the woods within a radius of half a mile, but not a sign of a bushranger could we detect, and somewhat reassured by our search, we returned to the stockman, who was working most industriously, and leaving Smith to remain concealed, and give us warning of the approach of danger, we joined labor with the old man, although not in the same place in which he was at work.

I had reasoned on the subject, and came to the conclusion that if Gulpin had buried his money, he would like to destroy all evidence of its concealment. He and his gang were on friendly terms with Darnley, and the former had piled up the dead bodies, with the evident intention of consuming them with fire, as we had afterwards done, on our second visit.

Now, it struck me as being likely that the spot where the gold was buried would be chosen by a man who was inclined to be superstitious, for the finale of the grand tragedy, and perhaps impressed with the thought that the dead men would guard his treasure securely.

With this conviction, Fred and myself broke ground amidst a heap of ashes, without a thought or care of the invisible guard, and in a few minutes we had excavated a moderate sized hole, and would have continued working, had not Smith interrupted us by pointing to the sun, and advising a respite, owing to the danger of a sun-stroke.

As our hands were somewhat blistered, and we had as yet not discovered the first sign of gold, we readily took his advice, and upon repairing to the spot where the stockman was supposed to be at work, we found that the bottle had proved too much for him. He was lying on his back in the place which he had excavated, with his face exposed to the sun, the shovel clasped tightly in his arms, and his snoring sounded like distant thunder.

It was with some difficulty that we at length aroused him, and got him to the cart, where he was allowed to rest and sleep as long as he pleased, and while he was thus employed, we made another discovery, which set us to wondering.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Robbery of the Cart. — Capture of Steel Spring.

What caused us so much surprise was the fact that during our absence the cart was visited, our provisions overhauled, a portion carried off, and one or two bottles of claret emptied. It was evident that the thief was in too great a hurry to draw the cork, even if he had had a corkscrew, of which there was some doubt; so he had just broken the necks of the bottles on one of the wheels, and then drank to satiety.

Our visitor was no ghost-like character, who could pass through a hole and not feel inconvenienced. According to the quantity of provisions which he had eaten and carried off, he must have possessed a human stomach of remarkable voracity.

It was very evident that we had a thief of extraordinary shrewdness to deal with, and that unless we were a little sharper we should be cheated of our gold and fleeced of our provisions — two reflections not very comforting.

We held a long conference and debated the best way to entrap our opponent, and yet we could reach no conclusion, and were about to provide our dinners, when Rover bounded from the bushes with a piece of cloth in his mouth, which he shook and played with for some time before he would relinquish.

It was the remnant of a blue flannel shirt, and the idea struck me that our visitor had not only taken our provisions, but had stolen a portion of our clothing. I examined the few articles which I had brought and found that my surmise was correct. A pair of pants and a shirt were missing; but I felt glad to think that the exchange had been made, as now I considered that we had our friend on the hip.

I explained to Fred and Smith the manner in which we could track our visitor, and they agreed to assist me in trying the experiment. I called the hound, and laid the remnant of the shirt before him. Thinking that I meant to have a lark with him, he began to tear the flannel and play as formerly, but I touched him with a small switch and he crouched at my feet, and looked up so reproachful and timid that I was almost sorry to think I was obliged to correct him. I steadily persevered until I impressed upon the mind of the hound that he was to follow the one who had worn the shirt, and if there was not scent enough the thief was not to blame, for the article looked as though it had seen service.

At length the dog comprehended me. He trotted to the cart, walked around it once or twice, with his nose close to the ground, and when he had got track of the thief he uttered a low bay of satisfaction, and looked up into my face as much as to say, "shall I go on?"

We caught up our rifles, and leaving the sleeping stockman to continue his nap, we motioned the dog to start, and followed close at his heels.

He led the way along the path until he came to the spot where I im-

agined I had seen a man disappear, and after snuffing for a moment, the hound trotted on, sometimes leaping over bushes four feet high, a feat which we found not easy of accomplishment, tired as we were, and the heat up to over a hundred in the shade of a forest.

If the animal got two rods in advance of us, a word was sufficient to check him until we came up, when, receiving our praise with an acknowledgment in the shape of a wag of his tail, he would trot on with renewed watchfulness.

We observed that our course led us towards the spot where we had been digging a few minutes before, and as we neared the clearing our watchfulness increased. Not a tree was passed without anxious glances being cast among the branches to see if an enemy lurked there, but nothing in the shape of a man was to be seen.

At length we were within a few steps of the bushes from whence we supposed the gun to have been discharged. Immediately in front of us was a low tree of the balsam species, with branches and leaves so close together that it was impossible to see through the top. The foliage was most dense, and the thought suddenly occurred to me that if a man wished to secrete himself that tree would be the one which he would choose from amongst the thousands within sight. I was not, therefore, greatly surprised when Rover suddenly stopped and exhibited signs of having treed his game.

"The thief is lodged in that tree," shouted Fred, eagerly.

"It is singular that we did not think of examining it before," I remarked, as we sheltered ourselves behind trees, for we had evidence that, whoever he was, he possessed a gun and knew how to use it, and therefore we did not wish to needlessly expose our lives to his aim.

Rover acted in a frantic manner. He stood upon his hind legs and sought to get at his enemy, and when finding that he could not, he appealed to us for assistance; and for fear that he should get injured I called him away, — an order which he obeyed most reluctantly.

"Come down from the tree," shouted Fred, "and we will give you quarter and kind treatment."

There was no answer; we listened, but not a movement was to be heard. An old parrot, that was perched high upon a blasted tree, attempted to imitate our cry, but he got no further than the first word, and that appeared to puzzle him so much that he gave up in despair and remained mute with disgust.

"Do you surrender?" he yelled.

Not a word was heard in reply.

"He is like the flying Dutchman," cried Smith, a slight superstitious feeling beginning to creep over him.

"Give him a shot, then, and see if he cannot be brought down," Fred said.

I saw that Smith had no particular relish for the duty, but for fear that we should laugh at him he raised his gun and discharged one barrel.

The leaves flew as though the tree had been struck by a whirlwind. A small branch was cut off by the bullet and fell to the ground; but no sign of an enemy was manifest.

"It's no use," cried Smith, with a lengthened visage. "We might

waste all our ammunition and the result would still be the same. It's no human being in that tree."

"We'll see," replied Fred, briefly, and he aimed his rifle near the top of the tree, and fired.

Not near as many leaves fell as at Smith's discharge, but the effect was more astonishing. The tree swayed back and forth as though some one was moving in its centre, and from amidst the dense foliage a voice exclaimed, —

"Blast yer hies, vot is yer doing?"

"Here, Smith," cried Fred, "there is a cockney countryman of yours up there."

"Come down," we roared.

"See ye hanged first, and then I von't," repeated the voice in the tree.

"Then we shall have to send another bullet into the tree to start you."

"If ye don't cut hout of these diggins, yer'll wish that ye had," replied our defiant acquaintance.

"Once for all, will you surrender?" was demanded.

"See ye blasted fust," was returned, in a dogmatical manner.

Fred let fly another bullet into the tree, and this time with remarkable success; for suddenly a singular-looking genius, with wonderful long legs, and those dressed in untanned skins of the kangaroo, hair side out, tumbled from the tree, feet foremost, and with bounds which I thought no human being capable of, sprang over the bushes and attempted to escape, which he no doubt would have done, as we were too much surprised to think of checking his career with a bullet, had not the hound, with a yell of satisfaction, followed in pursuit.

We started as fast as possible for the purpose of preventing the dog from killing the man outright, as we feared he would, but our alarm was groundless; for after a smart run of a quarter of a mile, we found the hound standing over his victim, and exhibiting a wicked set of grinders at every motion which his prisoner made to escape.

"Vot is the meanin' of this 'ere kind of a go?" demanded our prisoner, as we gravely took seats upon fallen trees, and regarded him with great interest.

The fellow was a curiosity, and I have often laughed at the ridiculous appearance which he made upon our first meeting in the woods of Australia.

His long legs and feet were encased in the skins of kangaroos, which accounted for the ease with which he passed through the bushes and left no scent but of the animal, for Rover to follow, and as I had often punished him for chasing kangaroos without permission, it sufficiently explained why the poor dog was so puzzled.

The skins of the animals appeared to have been fitted to the legs and feet of our prisoner while green, and by drying them on his limbs he was then unable to remove them without an hour's washing in water; a process which, by the looks of the fellow, he seemed to have no relish for; the dirt was glued upon his face as though it was warranted to wash, although it's doubtful if he ever tried the experiment; and I may as well observe here that water was his abhorrence, and he never drank it unless he couldn't get something stronger.

Upon the back of the scamp was a new blue flannel shirt, which he had stolen from the wagon, leaving his old one in exchange, and by the means of which we had traced him to his resting-place. Around his neck was a silk handkerchief belonging to Smith, and on his head was a skin cap, with a long tail which hung over his shoulders and resembled the brush of a fox.

"Will ye call hoff the hanimal, and let me up?" cried our new acquaintance, casting rueful looks towards us.

"Where did you come from?" asked Fred.

"Vy, didn't you see? I dropped down from the tree."

"Yes, we are aware of that; but how came you in this part of the country alone?"

"How does you know I'se 'lone?" asked the fellow, with such a significant leer that we involuntarily glanced over our shoulders as though expecting a gang of ferocious bushrangers to be within gunshot.

"Answer me," cried Fred, with pretended sternness, placing the muzzle of the rifle against the fellow's heart. "Tell me where you came from, and what you wish in the neighborhood?"

"Vell, I vill, if ye von't hinger my feelings with the cold iron. Take away the gun and I'll do the right thing. 'Pon the 'onor of a gentleman, I will."

We laughed at his last remark, and the fellow joined in with us good naturedly, as though he did not expect to be believed.

"Very well, sit up and tell your story," we said; and calling off the dog, who manifested a great reluctance to obey, we permitted him to take an easier position.

"Vell, the fact of the matter is, I am strolling round 'ere just for the fun of shooting parrots."

"You know that you are lying," Fred said, sternly.

The fellow seemed to think a compliment had been paid him, for he grinned so hard that the dirt actually cracked on his face and peeled off in scales. A motion towards our rifles brought him to his reason.

"Stop that," he cried, "and I'll tell hall."

"Go on," we repeated.

"Vell, then, I s'pose I'm 'ere for the same thing as vot you're here for."

"Well, what is that?" I asked.

"Vy, you know — the hold boy's tin vich he buried afore he vas taken up and dished."

"What do you mean?" I inquired, wishing to see how much he knew.

"O, don't 'tempt to gammon me, 'case I knows by the way that yer does — that yer knows all 'bout the trick. But I say, can't I come in for shooks?"

"Then you know that there is money buried near here?"

"Hof course I does. Didn't I see Jim Gulpin ven he planted it, and didn't I run hoff the next day, and ven I hears that Jim is a goner, and had got into the hands of the beaks, didn't I leave the mines, vere the vork is jolly 'ard, and come 'ere with the intention of raising it, and having a jolly good blow out at Melbourne?"

"Then you have been connected with a gang of bushrangers?" Fred asked.

"Vell, I did use to do the cookin' for 'em, vile they did the robbin'; but then you wouldn't blow on a fellow, would you?"

"What did you make a target of my body for?" I inquired.

"Vell, I vill be plain, and no mistake. I did think that if it killed von of ye, vy the rest vould run, and then I should be left alone to ring the blunt."

"And why did you not continue to fire at us?"

"'Cos I hadn't got any more bullets," was the frank answer; and on examination of his powder pouch, we found such to be the case.

"What have you done with your ammunition?"

"Vell, I had to live on something, so I used to shoot into flocks of parrots; but I've skeered 'em all hoff, I believe."

"And why did you not try to get hold of a sheep? There are plenty of those within five miles of the forest."

"And get pinked by the hold shepherd wid the long gun?" he demanded, with a knowing grin, which showed that he had heard of the skill of the old man with his smooth bore.

"You have confessed that you once belonged to a gang of bushrangers, and you may have been guilty of many crimes. It is a duty which we owe to the government to either hang you, or else deliver you to the police. Which do you prefer?"

"Vell, to tell the plain truth, I don't like heither plan, and I don't b'leeve that you will do it."

"Why?" we asked, astonished at his assurance.

"'Cos, then I couldn't help you get the dirt out if you give me up to the police. I'd peach 'bout it, and then you'd have to fork over to the government, and would get nothing for your pains."

"But suppose we should despatch you on the spot?"

"But there's no use s'posing any thing of the kind. 'Mericans don't often kill people in cold blood."

"You know that we are Americans?" we demanded, in astonishment.

"Of course I does. Didn't I 'ear all about ye vile I vas at the mines? Didn't the papers bring hus the news?"

"But how do you know that we are those which the papers mention?"

"'Cos I guess at it, and I don't think I'm a great deal hout of the way."

"And if we consent to spare your life you will consent to lend us your aid in searching for the gold?" I asked.

"Won't I? You just try me and see if I don't serve you 'bout right. I'm a regular hout and houter ven I takes a likin' to any one."

"On these conditions we will consent to protect and spare you. But mind, no tricks. The first indications which we discover of your playing us false, shall be your last moment on earth."

"All right," replied the long-legged individual, with a chuckle of delight.

"Now, tell us what your name is," Fred demanded.

"Steel Spring," he answered, with another grin.

"Then, Mr. Steel Spring, as you say that you are a good cook, we will test your truthfulness. Return with us to the cart, and let us see a sample of your skill."

"I'll do that, and you'll say that, however ugly I look, I'm just the feller to sarve as a cook."

Uttering these words in a chanting sort of way, Mr. Steel Spring stretched out his legs with a jerk, which resembled the sudden opening of a jackknife. He stood upon his feet, and then we had an opportunity to see how long and lank he really was; and yet beneath all his withered skin we saw that his muscles were of prodigious size, and that his strength must be astonishing.

We motioned for him to lead the way, and in a few moments we reached the cart, beneath which the old stockman was still snoring.

CHAPTER XXV.

Steel Spring's History.

Steel Spring made no idle boast when he said he was famous as a cook. In a shorter space of time than I conceived possible, he had built a fire, boiled water, and made an excellent dish of coffee, and then spreading our provisions under the shade of a tree, he informed us that our dinners were ready.

By this time Hardum, the stockman, was awake, and repentant, as most men usually are after a drinking bout. He seemed surprised that we had made an addition to our company during his snoring hours, but he was too proud, or too much ashamed, to ask any questions concerning the mystery.

As for Steel Spring, I observed that that amiable, long-legged individual eyed the stockman rather narrowly, as though he expected a few words of reproach, or something worse; but in this he was mistaken; for Hardum contented himself with expressing surprise at the length of his pedal extremities, and wanted to know if he was not sired by a kangaroo — an expression which our new acquaintance laughed at, as he wished to conciliate the old man.

As the sun poured down with scorching severity, and two hours would elapse before we could venture to return to our work without fear of being sun struck, we lighted our pipes, and stretched our forms beneath the shade of a gum tree, leisurely watched the smoke of the fragrant tobacco as it curled over our heads.

For a long time we smoked in silence, until at length Fred grew weary of the monotonous stillness, and wishing to add a slight stock of information to our store, exclaimed, —

"Steel Spring," and he regarded that wonderful being with a knowing glance, "you have a history. All men have histories, and I know that you are not exempt from the common lot."

"Vell, I don't deny that I've seen a thing or two in my life, and that it has been an eventful one," he answered.

"Then," said Fred, refilling his pipe, and composing himself in an

easier attitude, "you will be kind enough to tell it for our entertainment."

"I'll villingly do that, sir, if you'll promise not to go to sleep."

"We can give no pledges," replied Fred, with a grin. "Whether we go to sleep or keep awake remains with the historian to decide."

"Vell, then, I'll do my best," and Steel Spring crossed his right leg, as though it had helped him on many occasions.

I will relate his account of his life, although I shall leave his cockney expressions out, as much of it may mar the beauty and humor of the recital. I don't vouch for the truth of what he told us, and, in fact, I don't believe that Steel Spring himself meant that we should. However, he always swore that he spoke the truth, and, in lack of evidence, we were bound to believe him.

"I was born twenty-six years ago, in the vicinity of Belgrave Square, London, and as the locality was an aristocratic one, I need not mention that my parents were wealthy, and circulated in the highest circles in the kingdom. There was great rejoicing when I came into the world, and I have been told that Parliament adjourned in honor of the event."

"I wish to ask if the narrative is to consist of lies?" inquired Fred.

The fellow grinned as though he had been complimented, and without replying, continued, —

"I was sent to Eton when I grew old enough, and all that money could do was expended towards completing my education. Latin and Greek, however, are languages which I was never able to master, and it's owing to my dislike to them that I am now here. I will explain the reason, so that you may not interrupt me with expressions of astonishment. I was destined, when only ten years of age, to succeed the ambassador to Greece, an uncle of mine, who was full of years and honors, and wished to retire on half pay, like an invalid soldier or gouty bishop. You will see the reason why I was supplied with Greek roots, until I thought my brain would turn in digging them. But tasks and whippings were in vain. The more I was beaten the less I learned, and the upshot of the matter was that I was sent home, and then kicked out of doors by an indignant father, who swore in good English that if my head was only as long in proportion as my legs, I should have comprehended the dead languages in less than a month.

"Alas! how little do parents understand the feelings which animate the bosom of their offspring. I who was ——"

"Quit your moralizing, and drive on with your story," growled Fred.

"All right, sir," replied Steel Spring, not the least disconcerted.

"I had, when kicked from the home of which I was destined to be the ornament, only a half crown in my pocket — smuggled there by an indulgent mother, who dreaded her husband's wrath. I knew that the money would purchase me a rasher of bacon and half a dozen pots of half-and-half, but that would not support me forever, you know, and it was necessary that I should stir these stumps which my heartless father had ridiculed.

"With this idea I exchanged my elegant suit of black clothes which I was wearing, and dressed myself in others of a less attractive nature; and I will also state that I received a half crown from the Hebrew with

whom I traded — a piece of generosity on his part as unexpected as any thing I ever met in this world.

"After I had made the exchange I hardly knew myself, and I thought with joy that if my father's heart relented, he would not be able to discover me in the disguise which I wore. In fact, it was perfect; and for the purpose of testing it, I went to Hyde Park, and stood near the ring, and as the noble lords and ladies passed me — those, I mean, with whom I was on visiting terms — it made my heart swell to think that they did not even deign to look at me."

"I have no doubt of it," said Smith, dryly; and the fact of his being an Englishman made him appreciate the story of Steel Spring the more.

"I quitted Hyde Park, and to preserve my spirits I went to a public house, and drank a full quart of beer — a feat which I had often performed, but never with such good will. The proprietor of the house noticed the ready manner in which I emptied his pewter, and then surveying my legs, judged, very rightly, that I would make an excellent pot boy. He hinted at his want of assistance, and made me an offer of a crown a week, and the privilege of drinking the slops left in the pots. He did not have to make the proposal twice; I accepted without delay, donned a white apron, and the intended ambassador to the classic land of song and ruins went to work supplying workmen with beer and pipes. No one, to have looked at me in the bar room, would have mistrusted my noble birth, and I have often thought of the singular freaks of fortune. Some are raised by the magic wand, and others are depressed. How little did the nobility, as they gazed on my fair face, when an infant, think that the object of their admiration would one day become ——"

"Will you go on with the story, and drop the nobility?" demanded Fred.

"With the greatest pleasure, because I bear them no love, they having dropped me at an early age. At that public house all of my misfortunes commenced; and, singularly enough, I had no serious suspicions, until I was arrested and lodged in prison, that the proprietor of the concern was a dealer in counterfeit silver. I had often observed that all the change that came from the bar was new, and looked as though fresh from the mint, but I didn't dream that it was counterfeit; and when a police officer nabbed me, and searched my pockets, and exhibited a few bad shillings, I thought I should die with shame, for I little suspected that I was the medium through which the money was circulated.

"I protested my innocence, but the wretches said that my appearance was not in my favor, and that my sweet face was certain to lead me to the gallows; and faith, I was afraid that it had, yet my pride did not permit me to send for my parents and the nobility, a word from whom would have set me free."

"Steer clear of the nobility, if you please," cried Fred.

"All right, sir; well, would you believe it, the villains had the audacity to arraign me before the beak, when I pleaded not guilty, and dared them to the proof.

"I have a faint recollection that my defiance availed me but little, for

I was brought in guilty; and when the old beak sentenced me to transportation for twenty years, he took occasion to say that I was the worst looking prisoner he had seen for many years. I thought, even then, how much respect he would feel, were he but aware that I was connected with the nobility ——"

"Never mind the nobility," broke in Fred.

"I don't intend to, hereafter, as I think that I am better off without their acquaintance. Well, in a few days I was put on board of a ship, with a number of other distinguished gentlemen, and I started on my long voyage to Australia.

"Jim Gulpin was one of the passengers, and I early made his acquaintance, and won his friendship by a few acts of kindness, which distinguished strangers should always extend to each other. In fact, I became so useful to the officers of the ship that I was installed as an assistant cook; and when I was obliged to part with them, owing to the pressing solicitations of the wretch who has the charge of the hulks at Hobson's Bay, I don't think that there was a dry eye on board, from the captain to my illustrious commander, the chief cook.

"Owing to good recommendations, I was set at work doing scullion's duty at the hulks—a situation which I filled to the satisfaction not only of myself, but to the officers who had charge of me. I got plenty to eat, for I looked out for that, and I think that I should have served out my time with great contentment had I not learned that my old friend Gulpin had made his escape, but not until he had done for one of his keepers. A sudden desire to travel possessed me; I longed to see the world, to be free, and accumulate wealth so that I could return to London, and astonish the nobility and my hard-hearted parents.

"I watched my chance, and one day when I was on a visit to Melbourne for the purpose of carrying a bundle for one of the keepers, I thought I would begin my travels; so I started on a dog trot, in a direction opposite from the hulks, and when a pistol was discharged at my fine form, it had the effect of quickening my pace materially. Finding that the shot had no effect, the keeper ran after me; but what chance do you suppose he had with me, the possessor of such a pair of legs? In five minutes I had run him out of sight, but after I got outside of the city I did not lessen my speed, for I recollected that there was a mounted police force in Melbourne, and that they had a fancy for scouring the country in search of escaped convicts.

"With nothing to eat, excepting what I was enabled to steal — I don't mean steal — but then I didn't pay for such as I got, because I had no money in my pocket — I managed to subsist, and by skulking in the woods during daylight, and travelling at night, I struggled on, undetected.

"I used to visit encampments, and load myself with every thing that I considered necessary for my happiness, and by such means I soon was enabled to dispense with my convict suit, which was calculated to attract more attention than was desirable.

"A number of miners must have been greatly astonished, upon awakening in the morning, to find that most of their stores were gone, and perhaps they attributed their disappearance to magic. If they did they were wrong, for I hold myself personally responsible, and intend

some day to settle for all that I took, and I will not only pay interest, but principal also. Can any thing be more honorable?"

"But how are you to know whom to settle with?" demanded Fred.

"That is none of my business," replied Steel Spring, with a cunning leer. "It is sufficient for me to know that I am ready to settle when the bills are presented, and I don't consider that I am bound to hunt all over the world for the purpose of finding my creditors."

"Your ideas are certainly original, and deserving of consideration," returned Fred, amused at the fellow's impudence. "But finish your history."

"By such honorable means I was enabled to work my way along, striving to reach the mines, where I expected to earn an independence, when one day I fell in with a few notorious characters called bushrangers. The villains searched me, expecting to find gold, thinking that a gentleman of my respectable appearance must be loaded with wealth; but for the honor of mankind I am glad to say that they didn't get so much as a shilling piece.

"The robbers, intensely disgusted, swore that I must go with them, as their captain wanted a cook; and although I insisted that I was not qualified for the station which they intended to elevate me to, they only replied that I must either be hanged or work. I need not tell you which I preferred.

"When I was taken prisoner I had a large supply of provisions on my back, and they asked me why I hadn't stolen more while my hand was in. In vain I protested that I was innocent of crime. I was laughed at and marched off towards this forest, when their renowned captain was introduced to me, and who should he prove to be but my old friend, Jim Gulpin.

"Of course, I was at home at once, and for many months I shared the meals and confidence of my illustrious commander; but at length getting dissatisfied with my share of the prize money, I procured a dishonorable discharge, and went off to the mines in the night time, where I managed to subsist by my honesty."

"You mean," replied Smith, "that you were afraid of being dishonest, as the miners have a summary method of disposing of thieves."

Steel Spring grinned, as though he didn't wish to gainsay the truth of the remark.

"But about the buried money. You have said nothing about that," I observed.

"I knew that there was money buried there, because one day Gulpin sent his gang away on an expedition, and then started me after a sheep, (no offence to the old shepherd.) I thought something was up, so instead of hurrying to do his bidding I skulked around until he thought I was out of the way, and then I saw him dig a hole and put a bag into the earth and cover it up, and try and make the place appear as though it had not been disturbed. I smelt a rat, but never let on that I knew any thing of the matter, and it was not until I heard that Jim and Darnley's gangs were destroyed that I thought I would visit my old haunts and endeavor to get rich at once. I have been in the neighborhood a week, skulking about to see if any other person was lurking near for the same object as myself, and you may imagine my surprise when I

saw four men marching up to take possession of that which I considered my own."

"Do you still entertain the same opinion?" I inquired.

"My opinion since I have entered your service is your opinion, for you are four and I'm one;" and Steel Spring, with a contented look, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and gathered up the remains of our dinner and placed them in the cart with wonderful despatch.

"We will trust you," said Fred, after scanning the man's face; "but if you serve us a trick we shall remember it."

"You will find it for your interest to do so," was the composed reply, and bidding him follow, we took our rifles and led the way towards the buried treasure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Finding of the Treasure.

By the time we reached the scene of our gold digging operations the greater portion of the heat of the day was passed, and we felt refreshed and ready to commence work with a will. Steel Spring, who had promised his valuable aid in searching for the treasure, in consideration that we would befriend him and save his neck from the grasp of the police, had led the way with immense strides, and a confident air that inspired us with renewed hope and bright anticipations of success.

Upon reaching the ground we found that our shovels and picks were undisturbed, and it was evident that no visitor had intruded during our lengthy absence.

"Come, Steel Spring," I said, addressing that worthy personage, "point out the right spot for us to dig, and then we will go to work without delay."

"But I can't do that vithout some calculation and study. All great hengineers has to investigate before vorking, and I'm no exception to the rule."

"Why, you miserable scamp," cried Fred, angrily, "didn't you say that you could lead us to the very spot where the treasure was buried?"

"Vell, vot if I did? Can't a man make 'stakes — and vouldn't you 'ave said that you knew something, if a rifle vos placed agin your brains, and a feller threatened to blow 'em hout?"

"Then you mean to say that you have imposed upon us?" I asked, coolly, seeing that Fred was likely to get into a passion.

"No, I don't say that, 'cos tain't so; and I should but tell a lie if I spoke in that way. A falsehood is an abomination vich I can't stand, and I was never guilty of one," answered the fellow, with a grin which proved how well he liked to stretch the truth.

"Explain your meaning," said Fred, "or I will hang you on a gum tree, and use you as a scarecrow."

"Vell, didn't I tell you I saw the money buried from a distance? You don't s'pose that I would be very near when Jim Gulpin was doing secret things, does you?"

I made no answer, and he continued,—

"I took good care to be hoff so far that he couldn't even smell me, 'cos I knew that if I had but vinked once vithin ten rods he would have seen me, and then vot would 'ave been the consequence?"

Fred replied that he supposed he would have been kicked in a summary manner, and he was not sure but he deserved it.

"Had it only been kicking I could 'ave taken it very comfortably and thought nothing of it — but no, sir, it would have been nothing of the kind. It would 'ave been after this fashion."

He made an expressive motion with his hand across his throat, and judging from the habits and antecedents of the illustrious bushranger, there is but little doubt that he did wisely in placing a great distance between them.

"Well, point out the spot which you think contains the money," I said.

"Vell, I can do that, although I'm not to be 'bused and deprived of my supper if I don't happen to hit right."

"You shall be treated according to your merits," cried Smith, who had listened patiently to his woes, and was amused at his impudence.

"Vell, if I is treated according to my merits it's all I vants, 'cos I'se certain to get 'nuff to heat and drink without vorking very hard — and vot can a gemman 'spect more in this vorld?"

We returned no answer to his suggestion, and finding that we were disposed to be serious, and not likely to stand any more of his nonsense, he requested permission to occupy the same place where he had secreted himself when the bushranger buried his gold; and while one of us walked over the clearing he thought he could tell when we reached the exact spot. He gave as a reason that he had taken the bearings of the place by a tree which stood on a line with the bushranger while digging.

We gratified his humor, but to prevent trickery Fred was despatched to watch his movements and prevent escape. Steel Spring vowed and protested that he meant honestly by us; but he was too notorious a liar to be believed, and when he found that we would not trust him, he appeared to be highly pleased, and considered it a proof of his sagacity and cunning.

We watched them as they walked to the spot which Steel Spring indicated — a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile from the clearing; and when the fellow announced that he was ready for the test, I slowly passed over such portions of the ground as I thought contained the money.

Three or four times did I pass over the ashes where the bodies of the dead bushrangers were burned, and yet I heard no indications from Steel Spring. At last I set my compass, and walked in an exact south-eastern direction, about ten paces from the location of the hut, and within a dozen feet of the hole which we had already dug.

"Stop," said the long-legged biped, "don't move for your life! Vait till I comes — you've hit it for a farding."

With springs which caused Rover to howl with jealousy, the fellow bounded over the bushes towards us, and in a minute's time was beside me.

"Give me the shovel!" he cried, in an excited manner. "I is certain that you is standing on the place."

"Here is a shovel," said Smith, with a wink of mischief at us; "let us see how soon you can bring the dust in sight."

"It won't take me long, I can tell you," replied Steel Spring, throwing out a few shovels full and then pausing to rest, as though a new thought had entered his long head.

"Dig away," yelled Smith, who was wielding a pickaxe with great effort.

"I was thinkin' how much better I could direct than work," said the cunning fellow, too lazy to dig.

"Then stand aside and give me the shovel," cried Fred, impatiently.

Steel Spring willingly relinquished it, and pretending that he felt exceedingly nervous and faint, he squatted down upon the ground and watched with eager eyes every particle of dirt that was thrown from the hole.

Before we got fairly to work the sun had set, and the shades of night began to be thrown upon the dark forest of gum trees by which we were surrounded. We had wasted so much time talking and listening to Steel Spring, that the afternoon had passed away almost imperceptibly. To be caught in the woods over night was a joke which we did not care about indulging in, and we made strenuous exertions to complete our task before darkness had entirely set in.

Already had we piled up a large mound of earth, and excavated a hole big enough to bury an ox, and yet nothing was to be seen of the treasure; and as each additional shovel full of dirt was thrown up I began to grow discouraged, and felt that I had been deceived, and almost cursed the folly which led me to believe in the dying declaration of the bushranger.

"I don't see any use in digging here," said Smith, pausing, and wiping the perspiration from his heated brow; "the dirt we are removing now has not been disturbed since the formation of the island. If there is any gold dust buried in this clearing, we must search in another direction."

"But haven't I told you that you was in the right spot?" ejaculated Steel Spring.

"Keep your advice for those who ask it," returned Smith, bluntly, want of success having made him cross.

"Vell, haven't you all been haxing me, and don't I tell vere the money is? If you 'spect to get it, you must vork."

"Then take hold of this pickaxe, and see how you like it. Jump into the hole without a word, or I'll help you with my heavy hand!" cried Smith, somewhat irritated.

Steel Spring would have hesitated, but a glance at the face of his opponent decided him, and, with many a groan, he entered the hole and commenced working.

The rest of us discussed the propriety of suspending labor until morning, as the evening was so far advanced that it was impossible to see half

a dozen yards from our faces. Fred and myself were opposed to cessation, as we knew that we were in a dangerous part of the country, and how soon we should be interrupted by gangs of bushrangers it was hard to tell. The forest was full of outlaws — desperate men, who would shed blood freely for the sake of gold or revenge, and should we be surprised, there was no possibility of escape.

Under these circumstances, we urged that we had better work that night, dark as it was, than remain there two or three days, and expose our lives needlessly.

During the time that we were debating the question, Steel Spring was apparently busy at work, although I noticed that he paid considerable attention to what was going on, and listened to every word uttered with an interest that appeared unaccountable. I thought it was from curiosity, and did not call any one's attention to it; but when I suggested that a small fire should be made, so that its light would enable us to work to more purpose, to my surprise he urged the advantage of the scheme, and was clamorous for the privilege of tending it.

The project was dismissed as soon as formed, for I recollected that the light of a fire would attract visitors that we were not anxious to see.

As a last resort, however, we resolved to go over the whole ground, and endeavor to detect the spot, by discovering if the earth had been recently removed.

We no longer placed confidence in the story of Steel Spring, yet we thought it better to keep him at work in the hole, which was now even with his neck, than permit him to mingle with us in the dark, for somehow, we began to have strange suspicions that he was not dealing fairly by us.

Luckily, the sky was cloudless, and the stars shone with uncommon brilliancy, as though the constellations wished to afford us every facility for carrying our designs into effect.

The clearing was sufficiently large to enable the light to penetrate the open space, and with no other guide, we commenced striking our shovels and picks into the earth, in hopes of reaching the right spot.

I still clung to the idea that the money was buried under the ashes of the burned bushrangers, and with this impression, carefully scraped them aside, and felt with the point of my shovel, until I touched earth which I considered had been disturbed.

I said nothing to my companions, but worked diligently for a few minutes, until I became convinced that the ground had been moved at no distant day.

Wishing to be convinced that I was on a track which corresponded with the last words of Gulpin, I set the compass, and by the light of a match, noted its bearing.

The place where I had been at work bore in a south-west direction, and on pacing off the distance where the hut stood, I found it to be exactly ten paces.

"Hurrah, boys!" I shouted, commencing work with renewed energy, "I think that I have discovered the spot!"

My comrades hurried to my side, and all of us concentrated our energies upon that particular spot, and none worked harder than the aged convict, who appeared, since his recovery from the effects of too in-

tense an application to my flask, to be desirous of making amends for his weakness.

"You are not vorking in the right place!" shouted Steel Spring, from his excavation, stopping his labors to watch our movements; "you will find nothing there, I gives you varning. Come and hassist me, and we shall find all the gold!"

"Cease your cries," said Smith, sternly; "do you wish to bring a band of bushrangers upon us in this lonely spot, where they can murder us without opposition?"

"There's no fear of 'um," retorted the fellow, raising his voice to an unnecessary pitch; "but listen to my varning — you'll find not a bit of gold there."

We paid no attention to his words, but worked with energy, and while Smith examined with his hands every shovelful of dirt that was thrown out, so that we should not miss any thing, Fred and myself dug along the edges of the ground, carefully, yet rapidly.

Still Steel Spring persisted in calling to us that we were wasting time, and that we should find nothing; and just as he echoed his words for the third or fourth time, my shovel struck upon some tough substance. Breathless with hope, I stooped and felt of it with my hands, and to my joy I discovered a small canvas bag, which appeared to be stuffed with a heavy substance, for I found some trouble in lifting it.

"I have found it!" I cried, so excited that I could hardly stand; "here — feel of it, lift it, and see if its contents are not gold!"

I was about handing the bag to Fred, when a wild, shrill scream, apparently proceeding from our very midst, was heard, startling us by its unnatural character.

Fred dropped the bag, and sprang for his rifle, which was lying near him, ready for use, while Smith and the stockman appeared paralyzed with terror.

"For God's sake what noise was that?" asked the stockman.

Before we could reply, we heard an answering yell, which appeared to be distant about a quarter of a mile, while near at hand, the rustling of the bushes showed that either an enemy or a wild beast was regarding our movements.

"Who goes there?" cried Fred, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

There was no reply, but I thought I detected a chuckling laugh which sounded familiar. Before I could interpose, Fred had fired at the moving bushes, and for a brief second the clearing was lighted up with the flash of his rifle. I glanced towards the hole in which Steel Spring bad been at work; it was empty; that notorious liar and singular genius had made himself scarce.

Hardly had the echo of the rifle died away, before another yell, more searching and protracted than the first, again started our party, for it seemed to proceed from a tree not more than a rod distant; even the hound appeared disconcerted at the noise, and seemed undecided whether to attack or wait for more decided manifestations.

"God be with us," cried the stockman, suddenly grasping his long-barrelled gun; "let us make the best of our way from the forest, or by morning we shall not be alive."

"Of what are you afraid?" demanded Fred. "A wolf cannot harm

you, and at the worst, a wildcat or two are no match for us well-armed men."

"There are no wolves on the island, and wildcats are unknown," replied the stockman, calmly.

"Then name the animals which produced those screams," cried Fred.

"I wish that they were animals," rejoined the stockman, "for then there would be hope for us miserable sinners. The screams which we have heard are produced by men bent upon destruction."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have been duped by Steel Spring to reveal the burial place of the treasure, and that now, in answer to his signal, a band of murderers are already enclosing us in their meshes, and in a few minutes, unless we act with promptness and prudence, we shall be in their power."

"We will sell our lives dearly, at all events," muttered Fred, "and sooner than their blood-stained hands shall grasp this gold, we will lose it forever."

Again we heard a chuckling laugh amid the bushes, and angry at the imposition of the long-legged scamp, I raised my rifle, and guided by the noise, let drive its contents. A yell of agony, such as is often uttered by a wounded man, met our ears, and I rejoiced to think that I had punished his treachery.

"God be merciful to him a sinner," exclaimed the pious old stockman.

"You have punished him for his tricks," said Fred; but almost before he had finished the sentence, a scream of sardonic laughter, in a different direction, proved that he was uninjured.

Again did we hear shrill, prolonged yells from several parts of the forest, and from their distinctness we knew that the bands of bushrangers, or whoever were the utterers, were gradually closing in upon us, and to stay where we were for half an hour was certain destruction.

The light was not sufficient to see each other's faces, but I had but little doubt, from the manner in which my friends grasped their weapons and examined their contents, that they were determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

"I am an old man," sighed the stockman, "and of little use on earth, and were I but certain that my child would be cared for, feel that I should be content to die."

"Die?" repeated Fred, cheerfully; "your sight is still good, and your hand does not tremble. A bushranger at forty rods is as good as slain when you draw a bead on him, and yet you talk of yielding up your life because we have been caught in a trap by a crafty spy."

"Man's destiny is like ——"

"Spare your proverbs," exclaimed Fred, impatiently, "until we are in a place of safety. I feel like making my way out of these woods as fast as possible, and if I have got to cut through a line of robbers I shall leave my mark before completing the job."

"Then let us lose no time," Smith said, speaking after a profound silence. "I can hear the devils calling to each other as they make their way through the forest, and if we wait for their arrival we shall be hemmed in on every point."

Even while Smith was speaking, we could hear the calls of Steel Spring, repeated in rapid succession, as though urging his comrades to renewed exertion. I raised the heavy bag of gold to my shoulder, and away we went, tramping through the bushes, stumbling over decayed trees, and bumping heavily against growing ones. Every few minutes we halted and listened attentively; yet strange to say, not a sound was to be heard except quick breathing and beating of hearts. The stillness seemed worse than the noise, for during the latter we were enabled to define the position of our opponents, and knew that they were at arm's length; but now, when every thing was quiet around us, we knew not but our next step might bring us under their fire, and then farewell to life and fortune.

"Forward," whispered Fred; and on we struggled, the forest apparently growing more dense at every step, and at length we seemed so surrounded with impenetrable thickets that we were obliged to halt and consult as to the best route to the team, which we were anxious to reach.

Suddenly the cracking of a twig beneath the foot of a man who appeared to be making his way in the direction from which we came, started us. Rover uttered a short growl, and would have sprung upon him, but Fred held the brute with hands of iron and whispered a word of caution, and then the dog became mute as stone.

The invisible robber continued on his way towards the clearing, passing so near us that it seemed as though we might have touched him, had we been so disposed. He evidently was on the lookout for our party, for he would stop and listen attentively, and then proceed with careful and certain steps.

We waited until he was beyond hearing, and then extricated ourselves from the thicket and continued our course. For more than two hours we toiled and worked, until at length we saw an opening through the trees. With eager but careful steps we moved towards it, thinking that the worst part of our expedition was over, and I was just about to throw the gold to the earth and thank God for our escape, when I looked up and saw that we were at the very point from whence we started — that we were standing on the edge of the clearing, and that directly in front of us were twenty or thirty bushrangers, with levelled muskets, evidently taking our bearing with great familiarity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Capture of All Hands, by the Bushrangers.

There was no time to retreat, had we been so disposed; and though Fred's rifle flew to his shoulder with the quickness of thought, he apparently considered it better policy not to commence hostilities until the bushrangers showed their disposition.

Fighting was not to be thought of; for who would think of taking

part in a struggle when eighteen or twenty guns were aimed, and ready to be discharged upon the least sign of resistance.

There was one thing which I had the presence of mind to do. I stepped quietly behind the stockman and Smith, and dropped the bag of gold amidst a thicket of bushes, and I inwardly prayed that whatever might be our fate, the robbers would not get sight of the treasure.

"Do you surrender?" asked a voice; and following the bushranger's words, we could hear the ominous clink of the muskets as they were brought to their shoulders.

"What promises do you make us?" replied Fred, undaunted.

"What do you wish us to promise?" continued the bushranger.

"Our lives and arms."

"Our promises are easily broken. Why do you request mercy at the hands of bushrangers?"

"Because, in this case, if we do not obtain your most solemn pledge that our lives shall be spared, we will die with our rifles in our hands. I need not tell you that when we aim, we do so with the intention to kill."

The bushrangers whispered together for a few minutes, and from their eagerness we could see that a large majority of the men were in favor of complying with Fred's request. Once or twice we heard the word "gold" mentioned, as though that was the chief theme of their discussion. Presently the whispering ceased, and the man who appeared to be the leader of the band again spoke: —

"I have talked with my men, and they are willing to comply with your desire, provided you will deliver to us the gold which you found buried in this clearing."

"As for the gold," returned Fred, "we dropped it some time ago, and you are welcome to it if it can be found."

"Then lay down your arms and step towards us. We are not to be taken by surprise, having heard of your Yankee tricks."

"We had better trust to darkness and our guns," muttered the old stockman; but his warning was too late, for Fred advanced towards the bushrangers and placed his rifle in their hands, and with a sigh I followed his example.

"Come!" shouted the leader, his voice growing harsher as the disarming proceeded — "there are two more of 'em; hurry up, and don't keep us waiting too long."

"I make the third," said Smith, handing in his double barrelled gun.

"Ha, driver, are you here?" laughed the ruffian, as his eyes fell upon Smith's burly form. "You had better have stuck to the teaming business than digging up dead men's gold — I think you would have found it more profitable and less dangerous."

"There is where we differ in opinion, Sam Nosey," replied Smith, quite coolly. "I work at any kind of business where I think I can make an honest shilling, and don't see but this expedition comes under the head of regular trade. At the edge of the wood you will find my team and two pair of good oxen, with a bottle of brandy such as you have not tasted for many a day."

"You mean that I would have found things as you describe, an hour or two ago; but the fact is, my men were hungry; so two of your cattle

were knocked in the head, and a right jolly feed we had, I assure you."

"I wish they had been so tough that their flesh would have choked you," was the unsatisfactory exclamation of the stout-hearted Smith.

"Your wish is unkind, considering the favor which we intend to show you," sneered the bushranger captain.

Smith uttered an oath, and I thought that in spite of the number around us, he would make a push for freedom; but after glancing around and seeing that his intention was anticipated, and that the crowd had enclosed us in a circle, he gave up the idea.

"There is one prisoner missing — where is he?" demanded the chief, abruptly.

"There's no other to be seen," cried half a dozen voices.

"Fools! why do you talk in that way? The old stockman is one of the party, for I saw him not more than five minutes ago. Bring him out of the bushes and let us see if his hair has grown any whiter since the time he shot at me for killing a lamb. I have an account to settle with him."

"He has made his escape, for no one is to be seen," cried the men, after searching for a few minutes.

"It can't be, for only a moment ago I saw him mumbling prayers and hoping that his life would be spared. Fire the pile of brush, call in the scouts, and let me hear their report."

As the chief spoke, a huge pile of brush was fired, which illuminated the open space and cast a bright glare upon the faces of those present. Involuntarily, I looked at the person of the man who appeared to hold such despotic sway over his followers, and I shuddered while I gazed, for a more horrible face I never saw, except in my dreams.

His cheeks were scared until the flesh appeared livid and raw, and I expected to see blood trickle from the half-healed wounds. His eyes were large and glaring, being entirely unprotected by eyelashes, and as for eyebrows, they seemed to be eaten away and destroyed. The fellow's nose, however, was the most disgusting part of his face; for the nasal organ was entirely gone, and nothing was to be seen excepting two small holes which led to the chambers of the head.

I understood the reason that he was nicknamed Nosey, without asking a question, but it was not until some days after that I learned how he came to be so badly disfigured.

Charles Bowen, alias Nosey, was sentenced to transportation for twenty-five years for appropriating about ten thousand pounds to his own use by means of a forged will. He was a man of a good education, and withal shrewd and unscrupulous; but sharp as he was, it did not prevent his getting convicted and sentenced — and from the time that he stepped foot on board of the transport he began his career of defying officers and all wholesome discipline.

One day he attacked an assistant surgeon, who was attached to the vessel, and the doctor repelled him by hurling a bottle of oil of vitriol at his head. Bowen closed his eyes when he saw that the liquid was about to strike his face, and by resolutely keeping them closed until the powerful acid was cleaned from his flesh, managed to save them, and then the surgeons of the ship commenced and arrested the progress of

the vitriol, and preserved his life; but not until the fellow's nose was entirely gone, and his eyebrows and cheeks nearly eaten away.

A more hideous-looking wretch, as he stood by the blazing pile of brush, I never saw; and it appeared to me that he gloried in his deformity, for he rolled his glaring eyes at me, and chuckled immensely when he saw that I regarded him rather closely.

"The stockman has given us the go-by," said one of the gang, returning from his pursuit of the old convict.

"Have you examined every bush and tree between this and the prairie?" asked the chief.

"As well as we can in the darkness," was the answer.

"Return to the woods, and don't allow a space as large as a man's body to escape inspection. Away with you — our triumph is not complete without the head of the old shepherd."

"I can find nothing of the gold," said a voice that I had heard before, and looking up I saw our treacherous companion, Steel Spring.

The fellow regarded me with a sly grin, and winked his eye as he pointed to the deep hole where he had labored when we discovered the treasure.

A frightful expression came over the robber's face as he heard the report. His staring eyes seemed to become injected with blood, and the scars on his countenance turned to a more livid hue.

"Where have you secreted the gold?" he asked, with a voice trembling with passion.

"What gold?" I demanded, indifferently.

"The gold which Jim Gulpin buried here. You know what I mean; and let me tell you that a civil and correct answer will stand your friend, just at this time. You have no police to fall back upon, and if I but give the word, your lives are not worth a farthing."

"It is true, we were after the gold, but what evidence have you that we found it?" I demanded.

"The evidence of the man who has been on your track ever since you entered the forest — saw you remove the sack, and then saw you attempt to escape with your plunder. Come here, Steel Spring."

The long, lank, lying wretch came at the call of his commander, and with a gracious nod towards us, stood ready to answer any questions.

"At what time did you give the signal, Steel Spring?"

"The hinstant that I sees they had got the money. I didn't know vether you had returned from the trip vich you vas to make, but I vas determined to try the signal agreed upon, and to my great joy, I heard you hanswer the first time I calls."

"And you saw them remove the sack?" demanded the chief.

"Yes, hindeed I did; and 'cos I calls to you, these fellows fires at me, but they vas not quick enough for Steel Spring."

"You hear what my man says; you were seen to take the gold. Yield it to us, and go, and the devil go with you, for all I care; but deprive us of it, and to-morrow's sun shall not see you alive."

Fred, Smith, and myself held a whispered conversation for a few minutes, and concluded that it was better to give up the money and save our lives, and trust to chance to recover the treasure.

"Have you decided?" asked the chief, his voice growing more rough at each moment's delay.

"We have."

"Enough; lead us to the spot where it is secreted."

"You have but a few steps to go," I said, as I motioned for the bush-rangers to stand one side and allow me to approach the spot where I had dropped the bag.

"Let him pass!" exclaimed the robber; and, obedient to his word, the gang stepped aside, but closed in upon me, so that I had no chance to escape, even had I been so disposed.

"You will find the gold there," I said, pointing to the spot where I had dropped the sack.

Half a dozen arms were thrust eagerly forth, and searched amidst the rank grass and stunted bushes. Suddenly, one of the men uttered an exclamation and sprang back, holding aloft his hand, upon a finger of which was fastened a deadly snake, of a pale orange hue, with a fine ring of black around its neck.

With oaths, and cries of terror, the robbers sought to escape from the vicinity of their companion, who, with yells such as I thought no mortal man capable of uttering, endeavored to unfasten the firm grip of the adder's teeth.

We could have escaped at that time, and no one would have thought of pursuit, so busy were the gang in regarding the contortions of the wretch, who rushed wildly back and forth, begging, cursing, and praying in one breath.

Once I thought of starting alone, after vainly endeavoring to attract the attention of Fred and Smith; but I considered how cowardly it would be to desert my friends, and banished the idea, unless we could all go together.

"Will no one save me?" shrieked the wretch, running first to one and then another of his comrades; but as fast as he approached them, they would retreat, and hurl imprecations at his head for seeking to bring destruction upon themselves.

"Curse you all for a pack of cowards!" he yelled; "may you all die by the hands of a hangman! Will no one save me? Will no one relieve me of this cursed snake?"

"Hold your hand still, for a moment," cried Fred, suddenly starting forward, and picking up a bowie knife, which one of the men had dropped in his terror.

The poor fellow sought to obey, but his fright was too great; and as the adder curled its tail over his arm, without relinquishing its hold, he endeavored to shake it off, and succeeded so far as the tail was concerned, but the jaws were too firmly clinched to be made to let go so easily.

Fred's eye was quick, and his hand steady, and as the snake hung full length, pendent from the finger, he struck at it with the knife and severed it in two parts. The tail fell to the ground and wound itself into knots, but the jaws did not relinquish their hold until the last drop of blood had drained from the trunk, when, with an expiring gasp, the teeth were unlocked, and the robber's finger was free.

Stout-hearted as the fellow undoubtedly was, he no sooner saw that the reptile was dead than he fell to the ground in a fit. Foam issued from his mouth, and by the light of the fire I saw that the poison was

already performing its work, and that it was mixing with his blood and coursing through his veins with the speed of thought. His face grew black and commenced swelling rapidly, and all the medical science in the world would have been unable to give him an hour's life.

"Can you do any thing for him?" asked the chief, turning to us.

We replied in the negative.

"Then let him die where he is, and one of you take a torch and find the money. Be careful; there may be more snakes in the grass."

The men obeyed the heartless speech, and forsook the writhing wretch to look for the gold.

"There is nothing here!" they cried, in chorus.

"I put the bag there but a moment ago," I replied.

"You lie!" roared the chief; "you are deceiving us, and think to escape with life, and pocket your stealing. I tell you, if the money is not forthcoming, I'll hang you like dogs. Tie them up and lash them to a tree; I will give them a short time to think the matter over."

The robbers threw themselves upon us and bound our arms, in spite of resistance, and with an expedition that proved they were experts in the matter; we were then fastened to trees, and taunted with our instrumentality in destroying the gangs of Darnley and Gulpin.

Luckily, Fred and myself were fastened to the same tree, so that we could condole with each other in our misfortunes. This was the hardest situation in which we had ever been placed, and yet we felt no fear of immediate death, although we knew that an injudicious word would seal our doom without a moment's delay.

"Where can the money have gone to?" whispered Fred.

"I know not," I replied; "you saw me throw it amidst the bushes, and yet, now, it cannot be found."

"One of the gang must have watched our movements, and, during the confusion, moved the bag to another place."

As Fred ceased speaking, the dying man, who was lying at our feet, raised his head, and sought to get up; the effort was unsuccessful, and, with a groan of agony, he fell back and called in feeble tones for water.

"Water," he cried; "for the love of mercy, give me a drink of water; I feel as though I was burning to death. My mouth is parched, and my tongue swollen to an unnatural size."

"Give him a drink, one of you," grunted the chief. "It's probably the last one he will ever ask for."

"Don't say that," exclaimed the snake-bitten man, struggling to rise. "I am not going to die just yet, I can tell you. I have not half revenged myself upon those who injured me."

"Live, and be hanged, if you can," retorted the chief, coolly, seating himself upon a log, and lighting his pipe; "I don't hinder you from getting well, do I?"

"No, no, Nosey, I know that you would rather assist me," said the man, with a faint attempt at a smile, but it was soon banished from his face, and then he again sought to rise, but without success.

The poison was spreading swiftly through his veins, and we could almost see his body swell, so rapidly was it bloating him. He had unbuttoned the wristbands and collar of his shirt, for the pain was too great to keep them fastened; and as he lay at our feet a spectacle too

dreadful to be looked upon without pity, we wished that we had the means to save a life that had been passed regardless of laws or man.

"If one of you fellers are acquainted with a prayer or two, p'raps it would be well to mutter it over the poor devil, so that his soul may not be snatched by the evil one as soon as it leaves his body," said a bush-ranger of grim aspect, speaking to Fred and myself.

"I will willingly do all that I can to comfort the dying man," I replied; "but first I want my arms untied, so that I can hear his last words."

"Well, that's only asking for a reasonable thing, and hang me if I won't risk it," replied the grizzly robber, proceeding to untie my hands.

"Hullo," shouted the chief, "what are you about?"

"I'm going to let this feller confess Ben, 'cos I believe he's half priest or parson, and I think it's hard if a man can't have a little religion occasionally."

"Tie the prisoner up again," said Nosey, sternly, laying his hand carelessly upon a pistol which was stuck in his belt.

"Shan't do any thing of the kind," replied the robber, firmly. "Old Ben is going to die, and he wants religion before he starts. I'm not the one to refuse him."

"Once more I tell you to make the prisoner fast to the tree," cried Nosey, drawing the pistol and cocking it.

"Look a-here — is that your game?" demanded the humane robber; "let me tell you that you had better put up the barker, 'cos I've got one that can speak when it's told to."

The old bushranger drew a pistol and held it in his hand for a moment, and then, turning to his companions, said, —

"You ain't going to see me shot 'cos I want to 'friend as good a man as was ever transported? How do we know how soon we may want a prayer or two to help fix things up in the other world."

"Let him have the prayers," muttered the gang, with one accord. "What harm can they do?"

Thus backed up, the old robber, who had formerly been a sailor, continued to unbind my hands, while Nosey replaced his pistol without further remonstrance.

I knelt by the side of the dying man, but he was past consciousness, and no longer appeared to heed what was going on around. His tongue had swollen to such an extent that his jaws were open to their fullest width, and it was impossible to close them. His eyes were set and nearly concealed in their sockets, so rapidly had his face bloated from the effects of the poisonous virus that was coursing through his veins.

I spoke to him, but he did not heed me, and in answer to the robbers' questions, I predicted his speedy death. They received the news with great coolness, and fell back to their old occupation of smoking pipes, leaving me alone with the body.

For a few minutes I sat there endeavoring to relieve the poor fellow's sufferings by wetting his lips with water, and while I was thus engaged I was startled by hearing a slight rustling in the bushes; I looked up, thinking that the companion of the dead snake was about to visit us in search of its mate, and as I did so, I caught a glimpse of the wrinkled face of the stockman.

I did not start or manifest symptoms of surprise, for I had lived too long in a country where Indians were my nearest neighbors to allow such an emotion to be observed. I continued my occupation, therefore, and while I kept my eyes on the hiding-place of the convict, I did not neglect to note the movements of the bushrangers, who were grouped around the fire, and wholly unsuspicious of the presence of their most deadly enemy.

"Hist!" said the stockman, after successfully imitating the singing of a cricket to attract my attention.

I turned my head towards him, but I still pretended to be busy attending to the wants of the dying man.

"Cut Smith and your friend loose, and then stand ready to aid us in striking a blow. Be cautious, and not a word."

I was left in wonder, for the head disappeared so quietly, it was only by a slight rustling of dried leaves that I knew the stockman was working his form through the bushes to rejoin whomever he had enlisted to assist him.

I puzzled my head for a few minutes, trying to think who was near at hand, but it was in vain; and I at length concluded that a passing train of miners had volunteered, under a promise of a large reward, which now I had not the means of paying. I tried to invent excuses for the purpose of approaching Fred, and at length I hit upon a plan.

"I think," I said, speaking to the old sailor, "that I might relieve the man's sufferings were I to bleed him."

"Go ahead, then, matey," he answered, with a nod of his head.

"Let me see," I said, feeling in my pockets; "I believe that my friend has my lancet. Will you get it, or shall I?"

"Get it," he replied, mechanically, not even taking his pipe from his mouth to answer.

I had carefully secreted a knife which I had found upon the person of the bushranger, and with it I cut Fred's bonds, whispering words of caution as I did so.

"I haven't got the lancet," cried Fred, with a sudden shake, as though to prevent me from searching his pockets. "You know that I gave it to Smith."

"I'm sure that you didn't," Smith said, surprised at Fred's assertion.

Before he could utter further remonstrance I had severed his bonds and repeated my words of caution.

"Are you ready?" I heard a voice whisper close behind me.

I glanced to the spot where the rifles were lying, and then surveyed the bushrangers, as they lay stretched out before the fire, perfectly unconscious that we were plotting their destruction.

"All ready," I responded, making a signal to Fred to be on the alert.

"Stoop down a little," was the whispered injunction.

I obeyed the order, and no sooner did I bow my head than the bushes appeared to be illuminated with a sheet of flame. A roar of musketry that seemed to shake the forest followed the flash, and over my head I could hear the bullets whiz as they sped on their errand of death.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Opportune Arrival of Lieutenant Murden and his Force. Rout of the Bushrangers.

I HEARD a wild yell, such as men utter when taken by surprise—I heard groans and curses, and then, loud above all, arose a cheer which could only have proceeded from men who had some great matter at stake, and were determined to fight to the last for victory.

Through the smoke, which slowly drifted over the clearing, I saw half a dozen robbers spring to their feet and fall headlong, like logs, to the ground, and by the light of the still blazing fire I observed the astonishment depicted upon the faces of the bushrangers as they looked in the direction from whence the discharge proceeded, and stumbled over each other on their way towards the spot where their arms were stacked.

All this I observed in a few seconds' time, but before I could start to my feet, wondering who were the attacking party, I heard the voice of the old convict, shrill and wild, shout out a quotation from the Bible, and conclude with one of his semi-religious, fanatical expressions.

"May the God of my fathers," he exclaimed, "forgive me for killing the devils, but I couldn't help it."

"Charge, men!" cried a manly voice that I thought I knew.

A wild cheer arose that shook the very forest, and through the bushes came the regular tramp of disciplined men. I caught sight of the old familiar blue uniform, and one glance at the leader of the force was sufficient. I saw my old friend, Lieutenant Murden, and a strong squad of Melbourne police at his back.

I sprang to my feet and cheered lustily, and then grasped the first weapon that I could find, and joined their ranks. I saw that Fred and Smith were with me, and like eagles we swept down upon our prey.

A hasty discharge greeted us, and one man fell badly wounded, but we had no time to pause to administer to his relief. On we rushed where the bushrangers were endeavoring to make a stand, and were calling upon each other to fight to the last. Even Nosey was evidently determined to sustain his great reputation and die facing his enemies; but as we advanced upon a run we delivered our fire and tumbled over two or three others, and that, with the complete surprise which had been gained over them, completed their confusion. They broke, and dashed into the woods, but not before half of their number was placed *hors du combat*, and amidst them, stretched upon the ground bleeding from two bad wounds, was the old sailor who had released me.

"No mercy—kill the accursed dogs," roared the stockman, swinging his long gun over his head, and dashing after a young fellow who had fought desperately, but now sought to escape.

"Come back," shouted Murden, in a voice of thunder. "Venture beyond the edge of this clearing, and your life is not worth a sixpence. The bushrangers know every turn of the woods, and are already in

ambush, waiting for victims. Extinguish that fire, men, as soon as possible, and don't too many of you venture near it until it is smothered."

"You are the last man that I expected to see to-night, Murden," I said, grasping his hand with a pressure that expressed my gratitude at his arrival.

"Well, to tell you the truth," he replied, "I must say that three hours ago I had no idea of shaking hands with old friends. But let me station the men to prevent a surprise, for I shall have to stop here all night, as the risk is too great trying to reach the prairie until morning, and then we will compare notes. I see that you are well, and that is all that I care about now. Even Smith has not lost an ounce of flesh since our last meeting."

"I may not have lost flesh, but my worriment of mind for the last few hours has been awful," replied the teamster, with a grin of satisfaction at his escape.

"A few hours' sleep will restore you," cried the lieutenant, pleasantly.

By this time the police had extinguished the fire, which was burning too brightly for safety. The half-consumed logs were thrown aside to smoulder and die out, and dirt thrown upon the coals to extinguish their brightness.

"Maurice," called the lieutenant, speaking to his old orderly, "station four men at different quarters, and tell them to give an alarm if they but hear a stick move. The bushrangers have not gone far, I warrant you, and perhaps they will beat up our quarters before morning."

"Yes, sir," promptly replied the policeman.

"How many of our force are wounded?" the officer asked.

"Sam, sir, has got a shot in his thigh, and the blood flows pretty fast from the wound. I have tied it up as well as possible."

"I will go and attend on him, and see what can be done for his relief;" and the lieutenant started at a brisk pace towards where the injured man was lying.

"Well, Sam, how do you feel?" inquired Murden.

"Weak from the loss of blood, sir, but I think that I shall get over it."

"Get over it?" repeated Murden, in pretended surprise, "of course you will. I don't want to lose the best fighting man that I have got in my troop. When we get back to Melbourne you can go into hospital quarters if you wish to, but not for any length of time. I cannot spare you many weeks, Sam."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," replied the policeman, in a tone of voice that showed how pleased he was. "Did you see how I brought the fellow down who was aiming at us?"

"Of course I did. I knew the instant you sighted him that he was a dead robber. But don't talk any more. I will have a torch lighted, even if it brings the devils upon us, and by its light I will bind up your wound so that you will feel quite nicely by morning."

One of the men brought a lighted limb of a gum tree, and by it Murden examined the wound, which seemed quite severe, although he did not say so. After he had applied some balsam which he carried in

a case in his pocket, he re-bound the leg, and then ordered the torch to be extinguished.

"The poor fellow cannot live until morning," whispered Murden, as we walked one side. "The main artery of his leg is cut, and he is slowly bleeding to death."

"What are we to do with these wounded men, sir?" asked Maurice, after he had stationed the guard.

"What can we do with them? We have neither wine, nor water, nor medicine to bestow. But not to let them think we are cruel, call the wounded and find out how many there are, and tell them that in the morning we will attend to their wants, as far as we are able."

"Where is the old stockman?" I asked, not recollecting seeing him since the fight was over.

Word was passed for him, but every one declared that he had not been seen since the moment when Murden recalled him from the pursuit of the rangers.

"Let him go," said the officer; "he is perfectly able to take care of himself, and I have no doubt that he has a project in his head."

"But how in the name of humanity did he manage to find you at such a favorable moment?"

"That is easily explained," Murden replied. "I left Melbourne two days since in pursuit of a man who has been committing murder in the city. He started for the Ballarat diggings, and I have been on his trail until this noon, when I lost it, and had good reason to believe that he had cut across the country, intending to join a gang of bushrangers, secreted in the forest. I thought that I should get information from the old stockman; so I concluded to ride to his hut.

"To my surprise I saw that your horses were confined in the cattle pen, and after frightening the old fellow's daughter almost to death, I learned from her that you had been gone for two days on some kind of treasure seeking, in which her father was to take the lead and point out the money. I feared that you had got caught in some kind of a trap, set by the frequenters of these woods; so I determined, as I was no longer on the trail of the murderer, to take a look at your operations, and, if possible, lend a hand in getting the gold."

Murden laughed when he spoke of the treasure, and we almost feared that he suspected us of keeping the secret from him.

"But where did you meet the stockman?" we asked.

"I am coming to the point of my narrative. We halted barely long enough to water the animals, and get something to eat — in the latter, let me assure you, the woman was pleased to lend her aid, and supplied us with meat enough to feed a regiment; and when I told her that we did not need so much, she begged that we would take what we did not want to her father and Mr. Smith."

"To whom?" we asked, astonished.

"To Mr. Smith," replied Murden, gravely.

"Ho, ho, Smith!" we cried, "you have, it seems, been making a conquest, and now, for the first time, we are to hear of it."

"I assure you," stammered Smith, "I had no idea that ——"

"How long has it been going on, Smith?" we cried.

"There is nothing in it, I assure you; I never said much to her, any way, and what few compliments I have paid her, are in fact——"

"Intended to mean nothing. Very well, Mr. Smith, I shall take care to put the lady on her guard, the next time I see her," said Murden, pretending to be serious.

"No, don't do that," cried Smith in alarm, "because I don't know but I shall marry her, yet."

"Ah, if that is the case, I'll not interfere on any account. But remember, I'm to be asked to the wedding."

"I'll not forget," Smith said; and after that affair was satisfactorily concluded, Murden went on with his story.

"I accepted of her offering, and agreed to convey a portion of a baked lamb to her friend Mr. Smith, and I am bound to say that neither of you gentlemen was mentioned in connection with the affair. It was near dark, when we replaced our saddles upon our animals, and started across the prairie, but before we were half way to the woods, the last glimmer of twilight had faded out, and we were obliged to continue our journey by guess work, for no beaten trail leads across the plain.

"When we were within a mile or two of the secret path, I saw an object that looked to me like a kangaroo, on the prairie, so swiftly did it run. Not feeling perfectly convinced that such was the case, I called my men's attention to it, and one, who has sharper eyes than the rest of us, declared that what I took to be an animal, was a good-sized man, who appeared to be making the best of his way across the plain.

"I started in pursuit, and called once or twice to him to stop, but not until I had nearly rode him down, did he come to a stand still, and to my surprise, I found that I had come very near ending the days of the old stockman.

"A few questions and a few answers were all that I required to understand the case. I instantly mounted the old fellow behind one of my men, and at a gallop I dashed towards the woods, which I had no sooner gained, than I sent three of my men back to the hut with the horses, and ordered them not to come near us until after sunrise in the morning.

"Here commenced the most difficult part of our undertaking, as we deemed it best to take the robbers by surprise, and exterminate the gang, if possible. The old stockman undertook to pilot us through the woods, and the manner in which we crept to within a few feet of you without making any noise, shows that he performed his part with great success.

"The large number of bushrangers assembled, astonished me. I found that my force contained only one half as many as they did, yet I had no idea of not attacking. Desperate as I knew the robbers were, I thought they would yield upon being taken by surprise. My expectations were not disappointed; they did fly, and left one half of their force upon the ground."

"We thank you, heartily, for the trouble and danger which you experienced in saving our lives, for I have serious doubts whether to-morrow would have seen us alive," Fred said, shaking hands with Murden, at the conclusion of the latter's account.

"Say no more, my dear boy, for I know that you would have come

to my assistance as soon as I did to yours. But about this treasure; I see that you have been digging; have you found any thing yet?"

Before we had time to answer that question, Maurice called the officer's attention, and relieved us of a reply.

"If you please, sir, there's a dog out here at the edge of the clearing, and he's got a bushranger down, and has had him there ever since they run for their lives. The animal won't let one of us come near him, and threatens the throat of the robber, every time he offers to move. I can't tell, in the dark, what kind of a dog he is, but I think it's the one the gentlemen own."

"Poor Rover, I have missed him for an hour or two. Let us go and see whom he has taken as prisoner," I said.

We followed Maurice to the spot, and found Rover standing sentry over a prisoner, whose slightest motion caused a growl of warning. I called off the dog, and ordered the fellow to get up, so that we could see who he was.

"Vell, of all the games that I ever seed, this is a beater!" cried a man whose voice was familiar to me.

"Ah, Mr. Steel Spring," said Fred, seizing the individual by the collar; "we have you in our power again."

"Vell, if I haint thankful to think that I've hescaped from them ere villains, and got into decent company again. I 'ave trembled at the profanity of the brutes, and feared for my life ever since I've been with 'em."

"Do you think, you long-legged wretch, that you can impose upon us for the second time? Do you suppose that after betraying us into the hands of your companions you are to be spared?" we demanded, indignantly.

"Vell, 'ere's a go. All through my life I 'ave been suspected without cause. Fust, I'm cast hoff by my hungrateful parents, and left to seek my living, and artervords I'm made a fool of, and gets transported, and now the very coves vot I thought friends, turns agin me. Vot a vorld this is!"

"Why, you hypocritical rascal, did you not first deceive us by saying that there were no bands of bushrangers in the woods, and while we were digging did you not raise an alarm which brought upon us Nosey and all of his gang?"

"Ha, ha!" roared Steel Spring; "vot a funny man that Nosey is! so handsome, too!"

"You rascal, you will laugh differently in a few minutes. Lieutenant, let him be tied to a tree, and give him a few dozen across his bare back."

"No, don't do that," cried the fellow, in some alarm. "I never could stand a flogging, and my proud spirit vill break if I get's one."

"Tie him up, Maurice," said Murden, coolly. "I recollect the fellow, and a bigger decoy rogue does not exist in the country. He will lie by the rule of three, and then retract all that he has said, without the least regard for himself or others. I have heard of him a number of times, and now think that I shall live to see him punished."

"I 'opes you vill live a thousand years, lieutenant, but I also 'opes you'll not joke over my misfortunes. I've 'elped the gentlemen, and now I'm to be punished for it."

"Tie him up, Maurice, and use your sword belt over his back until I tell you to stop," repeated Murden. "I owe him a flogging for the manner in which he sent me on a wrong scent once."

"On my vord ov 'onor, sir, I didn't do so on purpose. I afterwards found that I vas wrong, and run after you to put you right, but you'd gone, and I couldn't find you."

"Lies will not answer your purpose, you long-legged scamp. I'll flog you now, and then carry you to Melbourne in triumph."

The fellow uttered a dozen excuses, but they did not avail him, and in spite of his resistance two or three of the men dragged him to a tree, and fastened his hands with their sword belts. Steel Spring called on all the saints to prove that he was innocent of trickery, and when the strong arm of Maurice, wielding a stout belt, descended upon his shoulders, his entreaties were pitiful.

"That's blow number one," cried Murden. "Go on, Maurice."

"Stop — for God's sake, stop," he yelled. "I vill tell all that I know, and more too, if you will let me go."

"Who killed and robbed those two miners on their way to Melbourne this spring?" asked the officer, motioning the policeman to suspend his punishment.

"Do you mean the two men near the muddy brook, or on the Ballarat Road?" inquired Steel Spring.

"The two last," replied Murden.

"Vell, don't strike, 'cos it hurts like thunder, and I don't mind telling you all about it. You see Nosey heard that they'd got the dust vid 'em; so I was sent to talk vid 'em and find out how much they had, and get 'em to stop in a convenient place; and then Nosey and two others comes up and pretends to be going our vay, and ven a good chance occurred the miners vere knocked in their heads, and Nosey took the dust and divided it around, but I didn't get any."

"Give him another cut, Maurice, for telling the last lie," cried Murden, coolly.

"Don't do that," shouted the long-legged wretch, as the blow fell with awful distinctness upon his back. "Darn it all, you hurt."

"I intended that the blow should," replied Maurice, making preparations to repeat it.

"Don't strike, for God's sake don't. I'll tell the truth this time," he yelled.

"How much money did the men have, and what was your share?" repeated Murden.

"I don't know how much they had, but I does know that I got a hundred pounds for my share in the affair. But I didn't kill the men. 'Pon honor I didn't."

"I believe you on that point. Wait a moment, Maurice; I have another question or two."

"I vish that you'd let me hanser 'em vithout bein' tied up," groaned the wretch.

"What became of that young girl who was on her way with a party

of friends to join her father at Ballarat, and who was carried off by a gang of bushrangers?" questioned the lieutenant.

"She's dead," replied Steel Spring, dropping his voice and looking around anxiously, as though fearful he should see her ghost in the darkness.

"Who claimed her as a prize?"

"Nosey took charge of her, and threatened to kill any one vot spoke to her; but I believe that she got a knife and stabbed herself, sooner than submit to his vishes."

"This is horrid," I said, hardly knowing whether to believe all that I heard, or consider it the effect of imagination.

"Nevertheless, it is true. You have never heard all the cruelties that the gangs commit; if you had you would be ready to exclaim, Give them no quarter, for they deserve none!"

"Now that I've hanswered all you vant to know, you von't vip me any more, vill you?"

Murden was about to speak, but just then a new subject engrossed his attention, and he had no longer an opportunity to inflict chastisement upon the begging wretch.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Revenge of the Bushrangers. — Firing of the Forest.

The punishment of Steel Spring was suspended, and the stout sword belt remained in the hands of Maurice, inactive, while all eyes were directed towards the heavens, from whence a bright light proceeded, which illuminated the open space where we stood, so that even the ghastly faces of the dead and dying could be observed with awful distinctness.

For a few minutes' time, even the busy tongue of Steel Spring ceased to wag, and each turned to the other, and asked the reason of such a bright light at that time and place.

"I think it's the moon just rising," one of the men ventured to say.

"There's no moon to-night," was the brief rejoinder.

"Then what is the meaning of the light?" was the inquiry; but no one seemed to fathom it.

Presently a few clouds passed over the heavens, and then we smelled smoke, of which they seemed composed.

"The bushrangers can't have set fire to the stockman's hut, can they?" asked Murden.

"They could not have crossed the prairie so soon, and the distance is too great to allow of such a reflection," was my answer.

"Hark, I hear the cracking of bushes," said Fred; "some one is approaching us."

"Look to your guns, men," called out Murden; "we do not know but this may be a device of the robbers to get a glimpse of us."

The policemen cocked their carbines, and sheltered their forms from the bright light behind trees and bushes.

We heard the quick panting of a person who appeared to make his way through the bushes with difficulty, and the next moment the old convict sprang into the clearing, trembling with fatigue and agitation.

"You are all lost," he shouted, sinking upon the ground, wringing his aged hands, and rocking his body to and fro.

"What do you mean, man?" demanded the lieutenant, sternly.

"I mean that there is no chance to escape—*the bushrangers have fired the forest!*"

I felt the blood at my heart grow cold, for too well did I know the import of those dreadful words.

"How do you know this?" asked Murden, calmly.

"I followed the bushrangers when they fled, and mixed with them and talked with them, without being discovered. They discussed a plan for being revenged upon you and your men. They did not dare attack you, openly, after you caused the fire to be extinguished; so that Satan upon earth, Nosey, suggested that the forest should be fired at three different places, and that you would seek to escape from the flames by going in an opposite direction."

"And what will prevent us?" asked Murden, glancing his eyes over his men, who were listening in silence to the revelation.

"All of the best marksmen are going in ambush to the left of us, waiting for your force to attempt to escape that way. They now guard the passes, and not one of us could get out alive," groaned the stockman.

"But we can make our way through that portion of the forest which is not burning," Fred said.

"Impossible," muttered the stockman; "the flames are spreading with the speed of a horse, and even now a huge wall of fire bars us from the prairie."

"Why did you not give us notice before?" I asked.

"I came to you the instant a torch was applied to the dry leaves and branches, but before I was twenty rods from the flames I could hardly have returned without danger of being burned."

"Well, gentlemen, what is to be done?" asked Murden; "shall we stay here and be singed like dead rabbits, or shall we push through the forest and endeavor to escape the ambush?"

"In either case I don't see but that our prospects of escape are hopeless," said Fred, quite calmly.

"Hark!" cried the stockman, starting to his feet; "do you not hear the flames?"

We all listened, and a noise like the roaring of the surf on a beach could be heard, but apparently at a distance.

"That does not sound encouraging, I confess," remarked Fred; "but I think that we can yet circumvent the devils."

"How?" cried Murden, eagerly.

"Will you be governed by me, for a few hours?" Fred asked.

"Yes, and my men also," answered Murden, heartily.

"Then let us commence work, for we have no time to lose. In the first place, collect all the powder that your men have, and cover it with

dirt, a foot high; we want no explosion to dishearten the men, and encourage the enemy."

"Do you hear, men?" cried Murden; "bring to me your flasks without a moment's delay."

The policemen hastened to obey the order, and a few shovels full of earth secured our safety in that respect.

"Now, then, as many of you as can use shovels and pickaxes, dig away at that hole, which Steel Spring commenced. Do not spare your labor, for a gang will relieve you, when tired. Dig deep and wide."

"But I don't see of what use that is to be," remonstrated Murden.

"Remember that you have promised to be guided by me. Don't stop to question, but see that the men work with a will, while I attend to other important duties."

Murden no longer sought to fathom Fred's motives, but grasped a shovel, and set an example of energy which his men were not slow to follow.

"Now, Smith, you and the stockman and Jack help me. Rekindle the fire, which has almost died out, and burn every stick of timber within reach on the left side of us. We will catch the bushrangers in their own trap, if they are not quick."

"But vot is to 'come of me? Vho's to take care of me? Vhere's my friends?" yelled Steel Spring, making desperate efforts to break the bonds which confined him.

We were all too busy to attend to the wretch, and merely glanced towards him occasionally, to see if his bonds held; but Steel Spring was a man not easily discouraged, and every few minutes we were addressed with prayers and oaths, to make provision for his safety.

The fire, which Murden had given orders to extinguish, was easily rekindled, and then burning brands were thrown upon the dry bushes and leaves, raising flames that roared aloft and caught at the branches of the gum trees, and then spread to the trunks, and leaped from bough to bough, driving parrots and gaudy-plumed birds from their nests, that vented their displeasure at being disturbed by uttering hoarse croaks of rage.

"You will burn down the whole of the forest," cried Murden, alarmed at the rapidity with which the flames were spreading.

"I had rather see it down, than a man in this company should be injured," was the brief reply.

"Amen to that. But, Fred, it's growing warm here. Is not the hole which we have dug large enough?" asked the lieutenant, wiping his brow.

"Not half," replied Fred. "Do you see that long line of fire, which, urged by a strong wind, is rushing towards us like a furious wave of the ocean?"

"Well, a man can't very well keep his eyes off of it when he knows that it is to crisp him up like a baked pig," Murden answered, with a rueful look.

"We have hardly begun to experience the heat from that line of flames yet, and our only chance of escape is by entering the excavation which your men are making."

"I see, I see!" cried Murden, a new light breaking in upon him. "It is our only chance, sure enough."

The officer spoke to the policemen, who, with coats off, were working like heroes, and they redoubled their exertions.

"The next question is, what shall we do with these wounded men?" Fred inquired. "We can hardly hope to save them all."

"There is but one of my force wounded, and if it is possible to save him, I will; but as for these cutthroats, I see no chance for them."

We looked into Murden's face to see if there was any show of pity for the bushrangers, but there was none. He had already calculated in his mind that the robbers deserved death, and the sooner they died, the better for the county.

"Let us speak to your wounded policeman, and see if he can bear removal," Fred said.

We passed over to the side of the clearing, where he was lying at the root of a tree which had as yet escaped the flames.

"Well, Sam, do you still feel like having another battle with bushrangers?" asked the officer.

There was no response. I stooped down and carefully removed the corner of a blanket from his face, and the open, staring eyes met my view. In the midst of the bustle and confusion, the spirit of Sam had taken its flight without uttering a groan, or one repining word. We gazed upon his face again, and left the corpse where we found it, to be licked by the greedy flames which were now roaring around on every side.

"We must burrow like rabbits," cried Murden, "or we shall be burned to death. It seems already as though I could hardly breathe. A breath of fresh air would now be worth all the gold of Australia."

"Don't talk of feeling suffocated yet," Fred replied, stripping off all of his surplus clothing — an example which the rest of us were glad to follow; and to prevent it from being burned, we rolled it into one pile, and covered it deep with dirt.

"When the fire reaches the edge of the clearing, and the wind blows the flames within a few inches of our heads, and the earth blisters the skin at a touch, then I shall not blame you for asking for fresh air," Fred continued.

"I certainly am obliged to you," Murden said, with a rueful look; "but if you will explain how we are to keep those same flames from melting our brains while we are huddled in that hole, like sheep in a pen, I shall feel gratified."

"Then I will explain immediately, for I see that only a few minutes will be allotted us by that moving circle of fire to make our preparations. Let the place which your men have excavated be covered over, with the exception of a hole to crawl into, with the pieces of half-burned timber which you see lying around."

"For what purpose?" asked Murden.

"To save our heads from being burned, as they otherwise would, unless protected," Fred replied.

"But the logs will get on fire."

"Not if they are protected by a heavy covering of dirt," answered Fred, composedly.

"An idea that I should not have entertained," muttered Murden, in astonishment.

"But now that you understand me, hasten the men in their work, for already our clothes give tokens of singeing."

Our situation was one which might well make a timid man fear for his life; for on each side of us the flames were roaring and surging like the grass of a prairie on fire, and over our heads the heavens were concealed by the black clouds of smoke which, urged by the wind, were traversing the sky at a rapid rate; and on that same night an alarm was entertained at Ballarat, ninety miles distant, that Melbourne had burned to the ground. So dense was the smoke occasioned by the consuming of hundreds of acres of trees in the black forest of Australia.

The fire on the left of the clearing, which we had kindled to prevent the bushrangers from approaching us and thinning our numbers at leisure, had already assumed a fearful aspect, and was running along the ground rapidly. I hardly dared to stop my work and watch the scene, so fearful was it. I had serious doubts as to the practicability of the plan which Fred proposed, yet I gave no evidence of my want of faith, and encouraged the men with example and words, and when a number of the trees began swaying to and fro, as the fire consumed their trunks, I remonstrated against their seeking shelter until the work was entirely finished.

During our struggle to secure a place of safety, we had forgotten entirely the wounded bushrangers, who were stretched out, side by side, at the farther end of the clearing. Their cries for assistance, however, soon called our attention to the fact that we had made no provision for their safety, and while the policemen were hurriedly placing a roof upon our den, Murden and the rest of us held a brief consultation as to what we should do with the poor wretches.

"Speak quick," exclaimed Fred, as a burning tree fell with a tremendous crash into the clearing, sending the sparks high into the air, and causing the atmosphere to seem like the breath of a furnace.

"Speak quick," he continued. "We can endure the heat but a few minutes longer, and our lives are endangered by the falling of trees. Shall we save the bushrangers and perish ourselves, or shall we abandon them to their fate?"

"I am as humane as any man alive," said Murden, "but I can't think that I am called upon to expose my command to death for the sake of saving our most deadly enemy. Were there innocent and unoffending women here, I should know my duty and behave as become a man, but now I must remember that I am a commander."

"I expected that you would prefer your men's safety to that of robbers," Fred said; "but as you are an interested party, we will hear what Smith has to say."

"My life is as dear to me as the rest; but while I cannot see how we are to save the bushrangers, I would gladly give all my wealth for the privilege of so doing," was the honest answer.

"Spoken like a man," replied Fred, rubbing his side, which, owing to his neglect to turn at the right moment, was somewhat scorched.

Faint moans, uttered by men who stood upon the brink of the grave, hastened us in our deliberations. We glanced towards the poor wretches

and found that they were endeavoring to work their maimed bodies towards us for the purpose of pleading for mercy.

There was one man, however, who did not move from the spot where the policemen had first deposited him, and although the flames were roaring within forty feet of his position, he merely turned a dimmed eye towards them, and appeared to be resigned to his fate. I thought I recognized his weather-beaten countenance and grizzly hair, and nearer inspection convinced me that my surmises were correct. It was the old sailor who had so manfully resisted the orders of Nosey, and insisted upon allowing me to administer consolation to the snake-bitten bush-ranger.

"Here is a man who must be taken care of, if I go without shelter," I said, pointing to the sailor.

"It is impossible," Murden replied. "He is badly wounded, and would occupy the room of three or four men. Let us retreat, for already do I feel as though my lungs were being boiled."

"You may go," I answered, firmly, "but not a step do I stir until I see that old sailor provided for. He saved my life, and I will try and save his."

"Don't mind me, matey," cried the wounded man, in a feeble tone; "my cruise is nearly up, and the log book will soon record my fate."

"If you die you shall expire without the torture of fire. We cannot save your companions, and indeed hardly know whether we can save ourselves, but the experiment shall be tried."

"Well, well," Murden said, seeing that I was firm in my demand, "we will share our den with him. Lift him up, men, and place him in our vault as carefully as possible."

The policemen performed the duty with an alacrity that I did not anticipate, and after I had seen the old sailor placed in a corner of the vault, and Rover by the side of him, I turned to join Fred and Murden, who were still arguing whether they could desert the other bush-rangers and yet appear honorable in the eyes of the world.

"The old fellow seems a little cast down," said one of the police, as I prepared to leave the vault.

I answered in the affirmative, and was continuing on, when the man touched me on the arm.

"Hist," he whispered; "don't say a word, but it's a little wine I have in my canteen which the old robber is welcome to, if you think it will do him any good."

I grasped the treasure with more pleasure than I should have experienced had I found a bag of gold flung at my feet. I thanked the kind-hearted man for his offering, and in another instant I had poured a portion of the contents of the canteen down the grizzly old fellow's neck.

The drink revived him. He expressed his pleasure at my kindness by a glance from his sunken eyes that told of a warm heart, even if it beat within the breast of a robber.

"Thank you, matey," the old man said; "but it's of little use to try and right the hull when there's a shot between wind and water, and the top-hamper is gone. Nevertheless, I take it in kindness."

I could not reply, for I understood enough of his nautical language

to know that he had given up all hope of living, and that the two wounds which he had received were fatal.

I returned the canteen to its owner, and hastened to join Fred and Murden. The fire was still working its way towards us on one side, and receding on the other. The heat, however, had lost none of its intensity, and every breath which we drew appeared to parch our lungs and consume us internally.

"Have you decided what to do with the wounded men?" I asked, as I joined my friends.

"Our first decision still holds good," replied Murden. "We cannot save them and save ourselves."

"Hark! Do you hear that shout?" Fred said.

We listened intently for a moment, and above the roaring of flames and crashing of trees we could hear the shouts of exultation which the bushrangers in a distant part of the forest uttered, as they thought how we were struggling for life.

That cry, so joyful in the thought of our misery, steeled our hearts against the wounded wretches, who, with uplifted hands, were praying for drink, for life, for protection.

"In, men," shouted Murden. "We can endure the heat no longer. Already do yonder trees threaten to fall and crush us with their weight, and a minute's delay may prove our ruin."

There was no struggling to see who should first obey the order. With military precision the men filed in as calmly as though parading for a drill, and in a short time no one but Murden and myself were uncovered.

"Enter," motioning to me. "I will be the last man who seeks shelter."

"But what shall we do with this poor devil?" I said, pointing to Steel Spring, whose agonizing yells for help had often interrupted our deliberations.

Murden made no reply, but walked towards the scamp, who redoubled his calls for help when he thought it was to be rendered. The officer untied the bands which confined him, and without a word he retreated with us towards our vault.

Steel Spring eyed us for a moment, as though uncertain whether he was included in the invitation or not, but when he found that the latter was the case, he broke forth into lamentations that fairly rivalled the shrill yells of triumph which we had heard his companions utter.

He pleaded and threatened, promised and protested; and when he found that we were invulnerable and unmoved, he uttered curses upon our heads so bitter that it seemed as though he had spent all his life in framing them.

I crawled through the narrow opening and found that the men were seated so close together that not an inch of spare room was between them. A small space was reserved for Murden, Fred, and myself, but it did not look large enough to seat one of us comfortably. In the corner opposite to me was the wounded man, and partly resting upon one of the police was Rover, as quiet and orderly a dog as ever suffered confinement for the purpose of saving life.

"And won't you take me in?" asked Steel Spring, as Murden entered our over-crowded den.

"Your miserable system of treachery does not entitle you to that kindness. Burn, and get a foretaste of what you may expect in the next world," replied Murden.

"I'll see you all hanged first," was the indignant answer of the long-legged brute; and we did not hear another murmur escape him, although we felt that his sufferings must be intense, and his ultimate death certain.

CHAPTER XXX.

PERILOUS SITUATION DURING THE FIRE. — STEEL SPRING TURNS UP.

As Murden crouched down by my side, he loosened his pistols in his belt, and whispering to me, requested that I would follow his example. While I wondered at his command, he spoke to his men, and then I understood his motive.

"During our long connection with the police force," the lieutenant said, "we have never been placed in a situation like the present. We have undergone almost starvation — we have had bushrangers howling at our heels and ready to kill all who fell behind while on the march — we have been nearly dead for the want of water — we have been surrounded by natives wielding poisoned spears, and you know that a prick from them is death — we have enjoyed good and bad fortune together, have we not?"

"We have," replied the men, with one accord.

"And during all the scenes through which we have passed, have I not shared your dangers and toils?" Murden asked.

"That you have," the police said, uttered in a tone of voice that showed they should like to see the man who would gainsay it.

"I ask you these questions, men, because all dangers through which we have passed were nothing compared to the present. Our safety depends upon our actions."

"Our actions?" repeated the men, in great surprise.

"Yes, I repeat it. Our safety depends upon ourselves. You feel that the air is close and heated within our retreat. In half an hour's time the present temperature would seem like winter if offered in contrast to what we shall endure. We shall suffer for water, and perhaps none of us will survive the ordeal; but let me tell you that our hope of safety is in keeping still, and enduring all without a murmur. If a disturbance does come in our midst, and one of you loses his reason, remember I shall not hesitate to sacrifice him to preserve the rest. I have my pistols with me — they are loaded, and I seldom miss my aim."

The men listened in silence, and by their looks appeared to agree in the conclusion to which Murden had arrived.

For a few minutes not a word was spoken, and not a man moved from his position or even offered to fan his heated face, for fear the act would be construed into one of suffering.

Almost over our heads we could hear the roaring of flames as they gathered force and fury in their course; but worse than all, the groans of the wounded bushrangers fell upon our ears with awful distinctness, in spite of the falling trees, which at times crashed upon our heavy roof, and sifted down dirt through the cracks like falling rain.

The flames were almost forgotten — the heat, oppressive as it was, seemed endurable when compared to the sufferings which we knew the bushrangers were experiencing.

We listened attentively, and could tell when they expired, one by one, by the cessation of groans, oaths, and curses which they heaped upon us.

Those who survived the longest appeared to have become insane; and after dragging their mutilated bodies to the entrance of the vault, laughed as they told us of the delicious warmth which they were experiencing, and died cursing their Maker, and their mothers who bore them.

I stopped my ears, but, long after the most hardy had died, I fancied that I could hear their dreadful ravings; and even at this late day, I frequently start from my sleep as I dream of the frightful scenes which I encountered in that black forest. Better death a thousand times than again purchase life at such an expense of suffering at the hands of others.

Hour after hour passed, and it seemed as though we could not possibly survive many minutes longer. Our tongues were swollen and hanging from our mouths, dry, parched, and apparently ready to crack for the want of moisture.

Our eyes were expanded, fierce, and fixed — our brains seemed melting, and a heavy pressure rested upon our temples. I counted my pulse, and found that, as near as I could judge, it was beating at the rate of two hundred per minute. My heart appeared to keep pace with my pulse, and throbbed so violently that it seemed as though it would force itself through my side. A feeling of death-like sickness stole over me — I closed my eyes, and tried to fancy that I was by the side of a cool stream, and at length, I think that my senses did wander; for I was brought to myself by feeling a hand laid upon my shoulder, and no gentle shake aroused me.

"Courage, friend Jack," cried the consoling voice of Fred. "Cheer up, man! the worst is over, and in a short time we shall be free again. Come, cheer up."

I remember looking at my friend long and anxiously, and trying to settle in my mind where I had seen his face before. I think that I even laughed, and told him that he was taking great liberties with a stranger, and demanded what he meant by striking me on my shoulder.

I also think that I saw him carefully remove my revolver, and place it beyond my reach. But all was uncertain; a blur appeared to be before my eyes which prevented my seeing distinctly.

"Here, drink of this," whispered Fred, and as he spoke he raised a small bottle to my lips.

The draught restored me to full consciousness. The liquor was claret — warm, almost hot; yet I thought that I never tasted any thing half so sweet and reviving.

I saw a score of eager eyes fixed upon the bottle which I held, and even Murden glared like a famished wolf as he heard the gurgling of the liquor in my mouth.

"Softly," whispered Fred, as I was about to apply the bottle to my lips the second time. "Remember there are others suffering as well as yourself."

Noble-hearted Fred! when did you ever fail to sympathize in the sufferings of others, and use your utmost endeavors to contribute to their relief?

"If hell," groaned Murden, "is hotter than this hole, I have no desire to go there."

"You would not get liquor like this to cool your tongue there," Fred said, handing the lieutenant the bottle to wet his parched lips.

"The bushranger is dying, sir," cried one of the men, who was seated nearest to the wounded man.

Murden hesitated while raising the bottle to his lips for a moment, and it was only for a moment.

"If I thought that the contents of the flask would save him, I would yield it," he said; "but all the wine in the universe would not bring him to active life, while a few drops will help sustain me. My duty is clear. I will try and preserve my own existence."

He barely wet his lips, however, but even while he was doing so, I saw by the appearance of the men that they were perishing from thirst; yet such was their pluck and discipline that not one of them uttered a groan, or spoke in an angry tone.

"Divide it fairly, men," Murden said, passing the bottle to Maurice. "Remember, each one can only wet his lips."

The injunction was obeyed, and the half pint of claret went the rounds, and came back to Fred with a few drops remaining.

As though to reward the men for their forbearance, a slight breeze, deliciously cool, swept over our heads, and revived us with new life. At the same time we heard a hissing on the outside, which sounded like a piece of hot iron suddenly thrown into a pail of water. We all listened attentively at the sound, hardly daring to believe that what we heard was real. The noise grew louder and louder, and through the small opening we caught sight of huge drops of rain falling.

"Hurrah!" yelled Murden, starting to his feet and poking his head out of the den; "we are all right now — it's raining in torrents."

The news was so good that we shook hands with each other, and congratulated ourselves as being under the especial care of Providence. Even Rover added his joyful barks to our cheers, and so eager was he that I suffered him to go out and roll in the wet to his heart's content.

The fire was being rapidly extinguished by the torrents of water which were falling, and so eager did our party feel to gain the open air once more, that they preferred to brave the rain and smoke to remaining in a place that liked to have been their grave.

It was rare to have rain at that time of year in Australia, and a number of the men construed it into an omen of the good will of Providence; but I reflected, and came to the conclusion that the cause was natural, and could be produced at any time if there were forests enough to burn so as to obtain the requisite amount of heat.

The danger, however, was not all passed. The ravages of the flames were stayed, but the ground which the fire had burned over was covered with smoking brands and livid coals, which, unless speedily extinguished by the rain, would keep us prisoners for a number of days — and with nothing to eat, the prospect was any thing but cheering. It is no wonder, then, we all mentally prayed that the rain would continue, and that our eyes were cast towards the heavens often to see if there was a prospect of the clouds breaking away.

Still the rain poured down in torrents, and huge clouds of mist and vapor filled the air and walled us in until we seemed as though confined in a steam box. We cared not for that, however; rain, rain in torrents was all that we prayed for; and so engrossed were we, that even the dead bodies of the bushrangers, lying almost at our feet, were neglected.

At length, however, our reason returned, and we found time to pay some respect to the dead. We resolved to bury them in a grave near the excavation in which we had sought shelter, and for this purpose three or four of the men commenced throwing dirt upon a large pile which we had previously thrown up. Hardly had the second shovelful been added before an extraordinary movement amongst the dirt took place, and the police started back in wonder and alarm.

"What are you afraid of?" demanded Murden.

"We are afraid of nothing," replied Maurice; "but the dirt appears to be bewitched."

"Nonsense! Strike the earth with the point of your shovels and let's see what witchery there is concealed there," cried the lieutenant, authoritatively.

Maurice no longer held back. He raised his shovel and drove it into the soft earth, and the effect was electrical.

"Blast yer hies, vot is ye 'bout," roared a voice that we instantly recollected; and before we could utter a word in astonishment, up rose the lank form of the genius Steel Spring.

"Is this the vay to treat a man vot does hevery thing he can to save ye?" the impudent wretch demanded, in an indignant tone.

"For God's sake, how came you alive?" asked Murden, looking at the man as though he expected to see him disappear from before his eyes at a moment's warning.

"O, it's wery vell to ax me how I does a thing after I get's out of a fix," Steel Spring replied, with one of his grins; "but I know'd that I varn't goin' to kick the bucket vithout vun trial for my life."

"Tell me how you managed to preserve your worthless life?" asked the officer, too much astonished to feel indignant, and almost inclined to believe that the fellow was under the protection of some good genii.

"Vell, I doesn't think my life very vorthless if you do, Mr. Hofficer; but in case you should ever get cotched in the same kind of a trap, I'll tell ye. Do ye see, ven I found that your company vas exclusive, I looks herround for means of safety, but I didn't find heny wery 'andy; if I 'ad I don't think that I should be here now; vell, the longer I stopped to consider, the wus I felt; and at length, ven the fire begins to burn the nice clothes vich I vore, I thought it bout 'time to do somethin';

so I 'appens to cast my hies on this loose dirt, and then quicker than lightning I digs a place, and lays down and covers me all hup, leaving only a leetle 'ole to breathe through. It vas varm, though — hawful varm; and at one time I feared I should die; but the Lord supported me in my trouble, and here I is, safe and ready to be of service agin."

For a short time every one was silent, so astonished did we feel to hear the treacherous wretch use the name of his Maker in connection with himself.

"God has preserved your life for some object which we mortals cannot understand," Murden said. "I shall not punish you, neither shall my men. The courts of Melbourne must decide upon your guilt."

"Vot, is you going to take me afore the big vigs?" asked Steel Spring, with dismay.

"There is only one chance to escape such a fate," replied the lieutenant.

"Name it, name it," cried Steel Spring, with avidity.

"By leading me to the hiding place of that arch fiend, Nosey."

"Is that all?" cried the fellow, with a look of intense delight.

"And do you consent?" asked Murden, disgusted at the fellow's treacherous instincts.

"Consent?" he repeated; "vy, of course I does; vouldn't Nosey 'ang me and all of his gang for the purpose of saving his life? and vy should I refuse to 'elp stretch his neck ven I can keep mine free of the rope? Consent? of course I does."

"Remember," said Murden, with a stern look, "that we are to have no tricks here. If you even offer to lead me out of the right course I'll make a hole in your body big enough to throw a Bible through."

"I should then be sanctified, vouldn't I, lieutenant?" asked the wretch, with one of his cunning grins.

"How far from this place is the gang?" demanded Murden.

"Not more than four or five miles, I guess," was the answer.

"In the woods?"

"In the woods," repeated Steel Spring.

"Easy of access?"

"Vot is that?"

"I mean, can I and my men get at the gang without being surprised on our part?"

"Vell, if I hoffers to guide you therc'll be no difficulty, 'cos I knows the vay, and no mistake. But my life is to be preserved, you know. Recollect that, lieutenant."

"I shall remember my word, and I will keep it in every respect. If you prove true, your life is safe, but if false, not a man under my command but will single you out for instant death. I know your tricks, and shall be watchful."

"I 'opes you vill, 'cos I can bear a great deal of that kind of vigilance. But I'm all right now. I know my friends."

"You'll know them better if you lead me into an ambush," remarked Murden; and here the conversation with Steel Spring dropped, but Fred and myself took occasion to speak to the lieutenant on the folly of trusting to him, but Murden was firm.

"If I can use this man," he argued, "to break up the gang of Nosey,

and destroy that wretch, I shall think that I have been of real use to the country, and feel content to retire on my honors. There is some risk, you say. I grant that there is; but consider how many people have been murdered by the villains, and then reflect whether it is not better to entertain the danger and strike a blow that shall free this part of the country of bushrangers for months to come. Come, come, look at matters in their true light and promise me your coöperation."

How could we refuse him, after the trouble he had endured for our sake? We extended our hands, and with a warm pressure the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Capture of the Bushrangers, and Death of Nosey.

"Vot, is the Yankees going vid us?" asked Steel Spring, when he saw Murden shaking hands with us, to bind the contract.

The question was such an impudent one that I did not feel indignant, and perhaps our calmness restrained the lieutenant from giving vent to his wrath, which we saw blazing in his eyes. At any rate he managed to answer in a quiet tone that we were to accompany him, and that the rifles which we carried, and which he had previously expressed a great dread of, would cover his body during our march.

"Then Nosey is as good as dead," cried the lank wretch, hardly deeming it worth while to notice the allusion to himself; and so elated did he appear, that he actually borrowed a plug of tobacco from Maurice, and forgot to return it until asked to do so.

"A portion of the men may continue digging a grave, while the rest can retreat to our late den and get our carbines and arms all ready. There is no knowing how soon we may want them."

The orders of Murden were obeyed promptly; and in spite of the rain which still poured down in torrents, the guns were put in complete order, and loaded ready for use. By the time the latter job was completed the grave was announced to be finished, and with not a prayer or a word of regret did we consign to the earth the remains of the dead bushrangers. They were all thrown in together, without much regard to order or decency, for the policemen were too accustomed to such a state of things to become sentimental; and with a last look at the weather-beaten face of the old sailor, I turned away and walked towards the opposite end of the clearing.

After concluding the burial of the men there was nothing for us to do but to sit down, light our pipes, and see the rain continue with unnatural fury. The progress of the flames was completely checked, and we hoped that if the storm continued an hour longer we should be enabled to pick our way over the burned district, find something to eat, and then fall upon Nosey before he thought it time to look after us.

That he supposed we were dead there was but little cause to doubt,

for he would not anticipate the earthing process, and would see some astonishment to find that we had passed through the ordeal in safety. At any rate, after we had concluded to proceed against him, we felt anxious to begin the good work, and have it off our minds.

The morning's sun, however, soon dispersed the clouds and dried up the rain, and when we examined the burned district we were rejoiced to find that we could pass over the ground if our feet were protected with shoes, a precaution which none will omit if an Australian forest is to be visited. In these important articles of clothing we were well supplied, and without delay we started. Murden gave the word to move forward, but first impressed upon the minds of the men the necessity of caution in regard to the manner in which their guns were carried, for, as he quietly observed, "we have enemies to kill, and can't afford to despatch each other. A spark of fire is sufficient to ignite our powder, and then where should we be?"

We found his advice good, for sparks from half-burned trees were showered upon our heads as we carefully picked our way through stumps that were black and charred and still aglow. On we went, as swift as possible, the soles of our shoes getting warmer and warmer each moment, until we feared that our feet would blister and burn with the exposure. At length, however, we saw the spot where we had left the team, and with a wild shout of exultation we rushed for it, each man striving to be first in the race.

Smith, nimble of foot, and urged by anxiety for the loss of his cattle, outstripped us all; but the poor fellow's face changed when he saw the wanton destruction of his property; for the bushrangers, not content with robbing our cart of every thing which it contained, had deliberately backed it into the fire, and the body was completely burned off. The wheels, however, were good, and so were its axletrees, and I knew that it would enable us to reach the mines with a little patching. The most cruel part of the proceedings was the chaining of a yoke of oxen to huge trees and allowing them to die a lingering, terrible death. The villains were not prompted to the deed by hunger, for their bodies remained untouched, burned to a crisp, apparently.

"If I had a bushranger within reach," cried Smith, surveying the bodies of his favorites with almost tearful eyes, "I think that I should be tempted to roast him alive, as my poor oxen have been. Why, of all the mean acts that the devils were ever guilty of, this is the meanest."

"Don't repine, Smith," said Murden; "when you get back to Melbourne I'll see that you have a yoke of cattle to replace them."

"I don't wish to hurt your feelings, Smith," Fred exclaimed, "but as the cattle are dead and cannot be brought to life, I think that the best thing we can do is to satisfy our appetites from their carcasses. I, for one, am hungry, and think that a pound of steak is almost worth its weight in gold. Let's strip the skin from one of the brutes, and see whether the flesh is burned up."

"A good idea, and one that we will adopt," cried Murden, with alacrity. "Maurice, where is your knife?"

The officer did not wait for a second bidding, for he scraped off the worst of the burned portions of the hide, and then ripped it off, leaving

about the hind quarters as juicy and wholesome looking meat as a man could wish for when in a state of hunger. Smith turned away, too much grieved to touch the food thus opportunely prepared, but the rest of us showed no such signs of delicacy, for in a twinkling our knives were out and cutting huge slices of the beef. The smell was very provoking of hunger, and so Smith thought, for he apparently could stand abstinence no longer. He joined us in our attack, and muttered as he did so:

"I don't see why the rest of you should fill up, while I starve; although I still contend, that to tie the poor things up and let them die such a death was cowardly and mean."

And always after that, if Smith wished to express the very quintessence of brutality and meanness, he would refer to the death of his favorites.

Our dinner was soon despatched, and once more we shouldered our arms, and under the direction of Steel Spring, skirted along the edge of the forest in quest of the lair of the bushrangers. We had proceeded but a mile or two when we saw the three men left in charge of the horses, galloping along apparently in search of us; and when they discovered that we were alive, and but little the worse for our fiery siege, their astonishment knew no bounds.

They stated that the flames had lighted up the country for miles in extent, and that they had tried to raise a party of miners, on their way to Melbourne, to come to our assistance; but that fear of being robbed or losing their lives prevented them. In fact, every one they had spoken to had construed the fire into a ruse of the bushrangers to entrap people, and would not believe that a large police force was in the woods, and surrounded by fire on all sides.

We gladly mounted our animals, for the men had taken the precaution, by the advice of the old convict's daughter, to bring our own horses with the rest; and then mounted Steel Spring behind Maurice, first taking the precaution of tying them together for fear of mistakes, as we told the former, and not from any doubts of his honesty — an admission which made the fellow grin until his huge mouth expanded from ear to ear.

The balance of our company was served in the same way, and after a sharp gallop of fifteen minutes, Steel Spring intimated that we had better dismount and approach the remainder of the distance with less noise if we wished to be successful in our designs. His advice was taken; when leaving two men to attend to the horses, we went forward at a brisk walk, and soon found an entrance to the forest that apparently had been long in use.

"This is the spot," whispered Steel Spring, "where Nosey's gang enters hafter a thieving job. Ah, many's the time I've been so loaded with plunder that I could 'ardly stand. But that's all passed now, you know, and in future I'm to be 'onest and good."

"How far from this entrance is the camp?" asked Murden.

"Not mor'n a mile, sir."

"Then lead the way. Maurice, walk by the side of him, and if — but you know what I mean."

"I think I do, sir," answered the policeman, drawing one of his formidable holster pistols, and examining the cap with a careful glance.

"Vell, please don't pint it this way, 'cos I'm always nervous about firearms in the 'ands of inexperienced persons."

"Don't be alarmed," replied Maurice, composedly; "I'm well acquainted with the pistol, and once killed a bushranger with it at the distance of fifteen rods."

"Did it hurt him?" asked Steel Spring, with a shudder.

"I don't think that it did, for he never complained to me about the transaction," replied Maurice, with a grin. Steel Spring regarded the face of his companion for a moment in silence, and then seemed to decide that it would be better not to meddle with such a cool philosopher.

"Are we ready?" asked Murden, after every man had once more examined his gun and pistols.

"All ready, sir," answered the squad, eager to push forward.

"Then step light and keep your eyes about you. Smith, will you and the stockman defile to the left of us, while Fred and Jack perform the same duty on the right? It is the post of danger I offer you, gentlemen."

We readily accepted our location; for we had hinted to Murden that our safety required some such disposition of our forces, and he had acted on the suggestion.

On we stole, slowly, but noiselessly, each man looking to see where he placed his foot, so that no cracking of dry bushes should give warning of our approach. In fact, so well had the men improved under Fred's hints and observations, that they would have passed for old Indian hunters to a casual observer.

Rover, as though aware of the nature of the expedition, trotted along a few yards in advance of us, stopping every few minutes to snuff the air, and then glance at my face, saying as plain as language could express the words, "There's no danger yet—come along and I'll give you warning."

For over an hour we picked our way, at each step whispering our repeated vows to shoot our guide if he did not conduct us right; and when I had begun to think that the fellow was playing us false, he suddenly stopped, and repeated his caution for silence.

"Ve is close to um," he said. "A few steps more and ve'll be in sight of their camp. Now, don't you think I'd better go behind, 'cos I'm not good at fightin', and Nosey is the devil when he gets in a rage."

"Don't stop to remonstrate," Murden replied. "Lead us to the very camp of the bushrangers, and don't think that you can go to the rear, and escape the action of my pistol in case you play us false. Onward you go."

"Here's a precious fix," muttered Steel Spring. "I've got to lead the way to the presence of that old devil, Nosey, and I know's he'll pin me the fust."

"Stop your grumbling," said Maurice, "or I'll treat your lank body to a dose of this."

He pointed to his huge pistol, and the threat effectually silenced all objections on the part of the guide, who meekly continued to move on, as though under the influence of some charm which he could not resist.

Ten minutes brought us to the edge of a clearing similar to the one

which Black Darnley and his gang had occupied. It was in the most dense part of the forest, and well chosen for secrecy. Near the edge was a spring of water, and directly in the centre of the vacant space was a log hut of large dimensions, with loopholes through which muskets could be poked in case of an assault.

There was no sign of life about the premises, and we were led to wonder whether the gang was within the hut sleeping off last night's fatigue, or whether they were off on an expedition. If the latter surmise was correct, we might have to wait three or four days before they returned, and that was something which we could not afford to do.

If the gang was asleep, an excellent opportunity was offered to capture them without the loss of a man; but who would venture to creep to the hut and find out, when there was a probability of a dozen men being encompassed behind those walls, waiting to take us by surprise, instead of our treating them to such a course of strategy!

Murden looked first at his men, but they rather avoided his eyes, and then his glance wandered to the old convict, but he did not appear to take the hint, and returned the stare with one of mildness. Fred's turn came next, and in him the right man was found.

"I see what you want, lieutenant," Fred said, with a smile, "and I am ready to comply. Keep me well covered with your guns, and I think there is not much danger."

He left his rifle with me, and then, getting upon his hands and knees, crept forward, carefully sheltering his body, as far as possible, with stumps and tufts of grass, until he reached the door, which stood open. He glanced hastily in, and then, without wasting time, turned his steps towards us as fast as possible.

"Well," we whispered, "what have you to report?"

"The bushrangers are in the hut, and sleeping, I think."

"Are you sure?" asked Murden.

"No, I am not sure that they are sleeping, but I am sure that they are lying on the floor, and apparently are not aware of our approach," returned Fred.

"Then let us move onward without delay, for the cracking of a branch might cost us our lives, and that is something none of us wish to spare, just now."

With cautious steps the men moved towards the hut, led by Fred and Murden. We met with no opposition, although it would not have surprised me to have heard a discharge of musketry as we advanced.

We gained the door without awakening our adversaries, and saw them stretched upon the floor, little dreaming that danger was so near.

On we stole until all our force was within the hut, and each policeman held a cocked carbine at the head of a bushranger. Still they did not awaken, and it could only be accounted for on the supposition that they had been up all night making merry over our supposed death by fire.

"Kill the first man that offers to stir, in his defence," the lieutenant said, after having carefully collected all the guns that could be found handy.

The whisper, slight as it was, had the effect of causing the chief, the hideous Nosey, to open his eyes and look around, as though half dream-

ing; it was not until his eyes met those of Murden that he fully awoke, then he made an effort to start to his feet, but he found the cold muzzles of Fred's and my own rifle pressed to his brain.

"We're betrayed!" he yelled, in a voice so shrill that it awoke every bushranger as suddenly as though the blast of a trumpet had rang through the room.

There were mingled oaths and exclamations, and desperate attempts to gain their feet; and one young fellow, who, in spite of warnings and threats, persisted in getting up, was shot through the head, and his brains spattered upon his comrades, who were lying by his side.

"Kill all who resist!" yelled Murden, scenting blood like a tiger; "if they submit, spare them, but death to the refractory."

The shooting of one appeared to have a good effect on the others, for although many a menacing glance was cast upon us, and many a half-uttered oath was checked, yet there was no more struggling, or thoughts of resistance.

"I thought you dead," muttered Nosey, after a keen glance at the face of the licutenant.

"It is not your fault that we are not," answered Murden, dryly.

"No, that it is not, for I meant to roast you and your force; in a few hours we intended to start on an expedition, and look for your bones. How did you escape?" asked the unabashed robber.

"That you will never know; be assured that Providence has no such fortune in store for you, and that if enough wood and rope can be found, the manner of your death will not remain a mystery."

"Perhaps you mean by that I shall die on the gallows?" demanded the bushranger.

Murden nodded his head in token of assent.

"I'll bet you two to one, that a rope will never end my existence," cried the fellow, with an impudence and coolness that almost surpassed belief.

"Bind the villains with stout cords, for the present," cried the lieutenant, returning no answer to the banter of Nosey, who fired with indignation at the epithet.

"Whom do you call villains?" he demanded. "We were forced to become robbers by the tyrants of the hulks, and all the wrongs which were there inflicted upon us we have returned; and we should not have been human had we acted otherwise."

"I have no time to bandy words with you, even if I had the inclination," returned Murden; "get upon your feet, and submit to be bound like the rest; we know no distinction, and serve all the same."

The bushranger slowly rose to his feet, and his hideous face seemed almost to burst, so livid were the scars which marked it; his eyes were injected with blood, and glared like those of a wild beast.

"Bind me as soon as you please; here are my hands; you see that I am harmless and unarmed; the lion can be taken by his mane, for his claws are clipped, and his teeth are broken."

"You bloodthirsty monster, do not compare yourself to a lion; bah! you are like the skulking wolf that sneaks and steals upon its prey, and after appeasing its hunger, slays for the sake of showing its strength. Give his cords an extra twist, men, for his impudence."

Murden uttered the words with an expression of disgust that did not fail to convince the bushranger of the estimation in which he was held.

"You think, I suppose," Nosey said, with an angry scowl, "that you will have the pleasure and triumph of carrying me to Melbourne alive; you are mistaken."

"Look well to your prisoner!" shouted the officer, as the men prepared to slip a cord over his wrists.

He was too late in his warning, for the desperate robber suddenly thrust his hand into his bosom and drew forth a huge knife, which he waved over his head.

The policemen started back, surprised and confused at the suddenness of the action; and before they could rush and disarm the prisoner, he was outside of the door, flourishing the knife, and threatening death to all who opposed him.

"Fire on him!" yelled Murden, perfectly frantic at the thought of his escape. "Kill him — kill him!"

The robber rushed towards the woods, and it seemed as though he would escape in spite of the loaded guns which we carried in our hands; but one of the men, more cool than the rest of us, discharged his carbine, and the ball struck the right leg of Nosey, and crushed the bone as easily as though it was a pipe stem.

Wounded as he was, he did not immediately stop, but continued on, striving to gain the woods, as though his safety was secure if he could reach them. But the effort was too much for human endurance. He staggered, struggled to maintain his erect position, and then fell with a crash to the ground. We went towards him; he did not move; we turned him over, and found that he was lying in a pool of blood, quite dead. Either by accident or design, he had fallen upon his knife, and it was sheathed to the hilt in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Return to the Stockman's Hut. — Smith in Love.

The bushrangers were struck with awe at the sudden death of their chief, and made no resistance as they were bound in pairs. Indeed, their audacity appeared to desert them, although they maintained a sullen aspect until they got a glimpse of Steel Spring, who, to prevent mistakes, had been bound to a tree, while we secured his comrades.

The glances of hate and scorn which were cast upon their betrayer appeared to have no effect upon his well-tried nerves, and he seemed to act as though he had done his duty and was not ashamed of it, and didn't care who knew the part which he had played in the drama. The death of Nosey, however, appeared to astonish Steel Spring, for when he was allowed to see the body he grew pathetic.

"So old Nosey is dead!" he exclaimed, looking upon the face of the

wretch; "vell, he vas a vonderful man, and used to rob more peoples than hany bushranger in these parts; ve shall miss him, I know ve shall miss him; and vere shall ve find a man to take his place?"

"Do you still think of robbery?" demanded Murden, sternly.

"No, sir; I vouldn't take a shillin' from a traveller to save my life. But ven I thinks of the times ve've had, I feels like shedding tears. A vonderful man vas Nosey; so 'andsome, too!"

"Cease your nonsense, and answer me one or two questions," Murden said; "the gang has plundered for months; do you know where they concealed their money?"

"I'm blessed if I do," replied Steel Spring, with alacrity.

"Do you think that our prisoners know?"

"Vell, that feller who is looking at me so cross, as though I'd hinjured him, could tell if he'd got a mind to," replied Steel Spring, pointing to a robber who seemed to be regarded as a sort of leader, now that Nosey was dead.

"Are you disposed to inform me where Nosey buried his money?" asked Murden, appealing to the man.

"And what inducements do you hold out, if I give you the information?" asked the robber, dryly.

"I do not promise you your life, but I think that I can get the sentence put off a few months," the lieutenant replied.

"And you suppose that I will reveal on such conditions?" demanded the bushranger, impudently.

"I do; you have every thing to gain, and nothing to lose."

"My life, I suppose, you can't nothing; that is already forfeited, you seem to think; but you shall find that, robber as I am, I know how to keep a secret."

"Then you refuse to divulge?" asked Murden.

The bushranger regarded him with a scornful air, and remained silent. Murden grew excited, and forgot that he was only an humble instrument of the law, and that life and death were not at his disposal after men had surrendered.

"Throw a tackle over the branch of yonder tree," he said, pointing to a sturdy gum tree which grew near; "we will save the courts of Melbourne the trouble of trying the fellow."

The bushranger did not seem surprised, or appear to be affected at the news.

Not so the policemen; they knew that their officer was exceeding his authority, but their discipline was too good to allow them to cavil at his orders, right or wrong.

They threw a rope over the limb pointed out, and then making a slip-noose, passed it around the neck of the obstinate robber. Still he wore his scornful look, and did not even ask for mercy, which Murden had evidently anticipated.

"Will you reveal?" demanded the lieutenant.

"No!" he yelled; and with his refusal was a gesture of the most impudent and insulting nature.

"Up with him, men!" cried the officer, beside himself with passion.

The men tugged at the rope, but with all their strength they could

not raise the man from the ground, owing to the cord being passed over a limb, instead of through a block, the friction was too great.

Smith, during all of this time, had been a spectator, instead of an actor in the tragedy; but when he saw that the policemen were unable to carry their designs into effect, he appeared to recollect the death of his oxen, and to think that the present was an excellent time to avenge their death.

He rushed to the rope, and pulled away at it with such good will that the bushranger was raised from the ground a few inches, and by the spasmodic movement of his feet, I saw that he was choking, and could exist but a few minutes longer.

"Are you mad?" I asked of Murden; "you have no authority to hang the man; the courts of Melbourne will make a noise about the matter, be assured."

The lieutenant appeared to reflect, and seemed to think that my advice was worthy of being taken, for he waved his hand, and the nearly strangled man was lowered to the ground, much to the disgust of Smith, who appeared to think that he was cheated of his prey.

"Once more, I ask you to reveal the hiding-place of the treasure," the officer said, when he found that the robber had sufficiently recovered to answer his question.

"I refused when a rope was tightened around my neck, did I not?" the bushranger asked, in a gasping manner.

Murden nodded his head in token of assent.

"And do you think that, after being half choked to death, I'll reveal now?" he demanded, in an indignant tone; "I'll see you and your cowardly police d——d first; and sooner or later I know that you will be."

"Up with him again!" cried the angry lieutenant; but his rage was only momentary, and before the men could put his order into execution, he countermanded it.

"You are too impudent a scoundrel to die immediately; a few months' solitary confinement in the prison at Melbourne, with nothing but bread and water to eat, and the certain prospect of a long, lingering death, will tame your spirit, and make you docile."

"Do you think so?" asked the bushranger, with a sneer.

Murden made no reply.

"If I am placed in solitary confinement," the robber said, "I shall have the more time to think upon the many poor devils who have begged their lives of me, and yet never got their prayers granted. I shall think of the most revenge I have had for my injuries during a long term of imprisonment at the hulks. I shall think of the many pounds of gold dust which I have robbed from passing trains; and better than all, I shall laugh to know that the police force of Melbourne cannot find it to enrich themselves."

"Devil!" yelled one of the men, more fiery than the rest, "do you mock us?"

He raised his carbine, and with no gentle hand let the breech fall upon the fellow's head. The blow loosened the skin, and let loose a torrent of blood.

"Yes, this is a fair sample of the manner in which the police of Mel-

bourne treat prisoners. Is there any wonder that they fight desperately to prevent being taken?"

He dipped his finger into his blood, and held it aloft for his comrades to see. Had those men been free, our number would have been lessened in a very few minutes; for such expressions of rage passed over their faces, that it seemed as though the devil had entered their bodies.

"You did wrong to strike him, Manuel," Murden said, and that was all the reproof the man received.

"When I'm arraigned before my judges, I shall tell them of the blow," muttered the bushranger, wiping the blood from his brow.

"Do so, if you think it will help your case any," answered Murden, indifferently. "When you get before the judges you speak of, let me advise you to keep a civil tongue, however, or the worse for you."

"I shall speak my mind," replied the bushranger, who appeared determined to have the last word.

Orders were now given to get ready for our passage through the woods; but before we started we threw the bodies of the dead robbers into the hut, and then set it on fire. Long before the flames ceased, we were safe out of the woods, and mounted on our horses, heading towards the old convict's hut.

Our travel was slow, as the bushrangers were compelled to walk with their hands tied behind their backs, and it was only by threatening to ride them down, that we could get them to move at any kind of decent pace.

Smith, whose whole ideas were concentrated on his lost cattle, left us to see if he could find one yoke which were unaccounted for. When we entered the woods in search of the gold buried by Jim Gulpin, we had left two yoke hitched to the cart and a tree, and after our severe ordeal of fire, we had found two oxen burned to death, while two more were missing.

Thinking that they might have wandered to the corral where the remainder of the cattle were confined, Smith galloped across the prairie and was soon out of sight. He did not rejoin us until we reached the hut, where we found that he had regained his oxen, and was paying considerably more attention to the old stockman's daughter than to his own affairs.

There was one thing which he deserved credit for, and it was accorded him with all our hearts. The supper which he provided was capable of making us forget our pains and fatigue; for a roasted lamb was smoking on a table, and three or four gallons of coffee were all ready to be drank, to restore us to new life.

All the articles which we had left at the hut were found in good order, and nothing was missing. It may seem strange that a stockman's hovel, miles away from other habitations, should escape the assaults of bushrangers; but the latter knew their own interests too well to meddle with keepers of sheep and cattle.

Many stockmen are in league with escaped convicts, and give them the earliest information in regard to the pursuit or routes of policemen; and although such a charge could not be brought against my friend, the old convict, yet the bushrangers knew that if he was molested or injured,

the owners of the animals under his charge would find it very hard work to fill his place, and be forced in the end to drive their herds to other grazing spots. Hence, the supply of provisions which the bush-rangers were in the habit of always considering secure, would have been cut off, and uncertain means resorted to.

The only instance of attack on my friend's house, on record, was when Jim Gulpin and his band required the surrender of a number of policemen sheltered within its walls. The result of that assault is well known to the readers of these sketches; so I will not review the circumstances.

During our absence the old man's daughter, or, in other words, Mrs. Becky Lang, had attended to her few household duties, and also watched our cattle, to prevent their straying from the corral. She had supplied them with water from the small stream, and in every respect behaved like a courageous woman, as she was. She had, apparently, recovered from the deepest of her grief on account of the loss of her husband, and her full ruddy cheek gave ample tokens of good health.

I saw that Smith was more attentive on our return than perhaps there was any occasion for; and I also noticed that the woman appeared anxious that he should have the best of every thing, and helped him twice to our once.

There was no occasion for our complaining, however, although we did joke Smith upon the conquest he had made, and asked if he had named the happy day; questions which he took in very good part, in spite of the blushes which mantled his sun-burned face.

That evening I offered my sincere congratulations, when Smith, after a confused account of what he wanted to do, informed me with an air of secrecy, that he had spoken to Becky, and that she had returned an answer that she thought she could make him happy the remainder of his life.

"But when is the wedding to take place?" I asked, coolly lighting my pipe; for the reader will please to note that it was not I who contemplated the awful act, and therefore I could condole with other people's woes with great equanimity.

"Well, I'd like to have it take place immediately, but there's no parson near," replied Smith, with great deliberation and solemnity.

Like all lovers, he wished to hasten his fate, and have the affair off his mind.

"But what will you do with your wife while absent with a load at the mines?" I asked.

"O, we've fixed all that — Becky and I have. She will live at our house in Melbourne, where she can be nice and comfortable, until I'm rich enough to start some kind of business in the city, when I can remain at home and enjoy her society."

I looked at the man, and actually compared him to a young lover, sighing at the first thoughts of his mistress, and picturing to himself how happy he could be with her in a cottage.

I filled my pipe afresh, and smoked for a few minutes in silence.

"Becky tells me that she took a fancy to me on the night that Gulpin assaulted the house. She thought I acted like a man on that trying occasion."

Ungrateful Beck, to thus forget the valuable services of Fred and myself. Love had indeed blinded her, for all that was noble and generous was centred in Smith.

"Well, Smith," I said, extending my hand, "I give you joy, and hope that nothing will ever occur to disturb your happiness. I should like to be present at the ceremony, but I fear that it will be impossible."

"I don't know as it is so very difficult. There are parsons at the mines, and Ballarat is nearer than Melbourne."

I knew what he wanted me to do, but I feared that we should waste too much valuable time. He looked hard at me to see if I was not intending to urge him to take the lady with us, but as I smoked on in silence, he did not continue the conversation.

We were all tired enough at sundown to stretch our weary limbs upon the ground, and endeavor to sleep in peace for one night. To prevent our being surprised, sentinels were stationed around the hut, with orders to keep their eyes open, and report if any thing of a suspicious character was seen.

Whether they acted up to the orders is more than I know, but of one thing I'm positive. After I rested my head upon my knapsack, I did not awaken until I felt a hand laid upon my shoulder, when, starting up, I found that Murden was standing by my side.

"Day is just breaking," he said; "I am sorry to disturb you, but you know we must be on the march to Melbourne by sunrise. Have breakfast with us for the last time, and then we'll to the saddle."

I could not resist the temptation, and when I had packed my blankets, I found that the policemen had nearly completed their arrangements for breakfast, and were feeding the prisoners with the remnants of last night's repast.

Coffee was swallowed hastily, and then the clear, ringing notes of the bugle gave the signal for bringing up the horses.

"You surely don't intend to make these poor devils walk all the way?" I asked of the lieutenant, just before he started.

"They will have to walk until we come across teams on the road to Melbourne, and then I shall let them ride. There is no other way that I can do," he replied.

Even while we were talking, the bugle sounded to mount, so anxious were the men to reach the city.

"There will be a large amount of money placed to your credit," Murden said. "Remember that each bushranger killed or taken prisoner is worth one hundred pounds."

"We hope we shall never be poor enough to ask for it," Fred replied.

"I hope that you never will be in want, certainly," Murden said, "but I do hope that your sensibilities will not prevent you from accepting that which is legally your own. I have no time to argue with you more, but in less than a month I shall be at Ballarat, when we will further discuss the subject."

"You will have business there at that time?" I asked.

"I think that I shall. The miners have suddenly become convinced that it is not right to pay government taxes for the privilege of digging gold. Nothing serious has occurred as yet; but how long the storm will hold off is quite uncertain."

"This is all news to me," Fred said, after a short pause, "and I hardly know how to act under the circumstances. We have no desire to violate your laws, or to foster rebellion, and I have half a mind to abandon our enterprise for the present."

"I should be happy to see you both residents of Melbourne, but I cannot advise you to turn from the course you have marked out. Go to the mines and satisfy yourselves that the labor of gold digging is the hardest labor that you ever undertook, and that a week of such work is sufficient to convince you of the fact."

We resolved to follow Murden's advice, and were about to bid him farewell, when he added, —

"If you conclude to remain at the mines, write me a full account of how matters stand, and what you think of the demands of the miners. I can rely upon you, for you have not mingled with the men, and of course do not at present sympathize with them. I do not ask the favor because I wish you to act the part of a spy, but simply for my own gratification."

We promised faithfully to keep him advised of our movements, and also those of the disaffected part of the residents of Ballarat, and with a hearty shake of his hand, Murden wheeled his horse and galloped after his command, which had been gone some time.

"Now, Smith, we are once more dependent upon ourselves. Shall we first go after our cart, and repair it, or do you feel like resting for a day or two?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Smith, in response to Fred's question. "I feel as though I should like to rest for a few hours; you see the confounded hole where we roosted was so hot, that I'm pretty nearly used up."

I saw through his design, but concluded not to notice it. Like all lovers, he hated to tear himself from the idol of his heart, and thought that a few hours might alleviate his pain.

"Well, we'll postpone our trip until to-morrow, and to be certain that we shall be ready then, we will take two yoke of cattle and bring up the team and repair it. Had we not lost that bag of gold which we have wasted so much time for, I think that we should have bought you a new cart, of later pattern."

Fred spoke jestingly, and yet not without a sigh at the magnitude of our loss. The old stockman, who was seated on a bench at his door, overheard the conversation, and interrupted us.

"Who says the gold is lost?" he asked.

"We all do," replied Fred; "the bag was not to be found where Jack placed it."

"I know that," the old man answered, with a silent chuckle.

"How do you know that it was gone?" I demanded.

"Why, because when you threw it down, I picked it up, and made my way out of the woods as fast as possible."

"And the bushrangers took it from you?" I demanded.

"I didn't say so," the stockman replied, coolly.

"You don't mean to tell me that the money is safe?" asked Fred.

"Well, I should think it was, because I don't believe that any bushranger would discover the place where I hid it."

"Bless your old heart!" cried Smith, slapping him on the shoulder; "you are worth a dozen of us young ones. But why didn't you say something about it before?"

"And let those police fellers share with us? No, no; I know too much for that; they would have required at least half the amount found, and I didn't think my young friends here would be willing to be bled to such an extent. They shall have the money, and can do as they please. I have redeemed my word; I promised to assist them, for they have assisted me; and when I have placed the gold in their hands, I shall think that I have only paid them a small portion of the debt which I owe them."

We were too much surprised and delighted to speak for some time, for the recovery of the money was something we were not prepared for.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Recovery of the Gold. — Arrival at Ballarat.

"Lead us to the spot where you have secreted our gold," we cried, with one accord.

"There's time enough," replied the old man; "I tell you that it is safe, and where I can get it any time. What more would you have?"

"We would have the assurance that we possess it, so that we can reward those who have aided us in searching for it. We wish to feel that we are indeed worth so much money, so that we can lay our plans for the future."

"Do you say that you wish to reward those who helped you obtain it?" asked the stockman, removing his pipe and pricking up his ears.

"Of course we do," replied Fred, eagerly; "do you think that we are so selfish as to claim the whole of the prize?"

"It's not for myself that I ask; 'tis for my daughter, who, in case I am called to rest, will be destitute. Every pound shall be returned to you, and then if you think from out of your abundant means, you can spare the old convict and his child a few grains of dust, why, we shall be thankful."

"Don't fear for me, father," the daughter said, with an expressive glance at the brawny form of Smith, which seemed to say that he is "strong enough to take care of me in this world of trouble."

"But I do care for you, for who else have I to love in this world?" answered the stockman, wiping away a tear.

"And will you not let another share that love?" she said, fondling his gray hairs, as though she had just awakened to a sense of his worth.

"What do you mean, girl?" he demanded, with a suspicious glance at her face, which was suffused with blushes.

"I mean," she replied, coloring with confusion, "that if a suitor

should present himself, would you not be willing that I should marry again?"

"You have just lost one husband, and who thinks of whispering nonsense in your ears? Not these young gallants, I hope, for they never would be willing to introduce you to their homes; and if they mean false, the old gun is still capable of sending a bullet as true as the day that I took it from a bushranger for killing my sheep."

"O, no, father; the young gentlemen have hardly spoken to me, and if I should wait for them to make love, I should never be married."

"Then who has caught your fancy, and made you feel as though you wished to desert your old father?" demanded the old convict, sternly.

"Not to desert you, father, for you shall come and live with us, and give up your shepherd's occupation. The work is too hard and dangerous for one of your years, and if you wish to make money the city offers larger inducements."

"I don't understand all of this," cried the old man, wiping his brow, and staring at us as though he wished we would explain. "You want me to live with you, yet when, and where, I am left to conjecture."

"He will tell you all," cried the daughter, breaking away and entering the hut, her face nearly as red as Smith's, and the latter's seemed as though burning. He cast an imploring glance towards me, and I helped him out of the dilemma as well as I was able.

"A man whom you might well be proud to call son-in-law has taken a fancy to your daughter, and seeks to make her his wife. The match is one that you can't help approving, for he is able to support her and be a kind husband. What more can you ask for?"

"I ask for the name of the person, and you confuse me with a torrent of praise," exclaimed the old man, testily.

"Here he is to speak for himself," I said, leading Smith up. "This is the man who desires to become your son-in-law."

"Are you serious, Smith?" the stockman asked, with a suspicious glance of his keen, gray eye.

"I assure you that I am, and that I will labor with all my might to make your child a happy wife."

Smith bore the scrutiny without flinching, although his words were uttered by syllables.

"But my child is poor; I can give her neither wealth, nor a proud, untarnished name. I have been a sentenced convict."

"And what have I been?" asked Smith, with a tremulous voice, his head falling upon his breast.

"Let us not refer to such matters," cried the stockman, briskly, throwing off, with an effort, the constraint which the conversation had given him. "I ask you if you are willing to marry my daughter, poor as she is, and poor as you know me to be?'

The stockman's gray eyes were fixed upon the face of the suitor as though reading his most secret thoughts.

"I have already answered that question, and told you that I was willing and anxious to have the ceremony performed without delay. You shall live with us, and take care of the house while I am at the mines. You shall never want as long as I possess a shilling," answered Smith, heartily.

"Do those words come from your heart?" asked the old convict, eagerly.

"Else I should not have uttered them," Smith answered.

"Then my daughter shall be your wife; but she will not be the penniless woman you think for. Follow me, and I will show you a sight that will surprise you."

Thinking that the invitation was not addressed to us, Fred and myself held back, and did not offer to follow the old man into his hut. The stockman saw that we hesitated, and he called to us.

"Come in, all of you. I can trust friends, and I am sure you have all proved to be such."

We followed, wondering what he meant by his words and hasty gestures, and half inclined to think that the late trials through which he had passed, had unsettled his brain.

"Come in," he whispered, "and shut the door. We don't want passing strangers to see what we have concealed. Becky, where is the iron bar?" he whispered, still lower.

His daughter handed a small iron bar to him, and with it he raised the corner of a heavy stone, which formed his hearth.

"Now hold the bar in that position for me," he said, addressing Smith.

The latter complied with his request, when the stockman inserted his hand under the stone, and after groping about for a moment, pulled out a heavy sheepskin bag, and laid it beside him. Once more he reached, and again dragged to light another bag, similar in size and weight. He motioned to let the stone return to its place, and then turned to us with a triumphant air.

While the old man was thus employed, we remained silent, hardly knowing what the proceedings on his part meant. With trembling hands he untied the strings which confined the mouths of the bags, and held them up for us to view. To our amazement, we found they were filled with fine gold dust, of an excellent quality, and that the two sacks contained not less than twenty thousand dollars' worth.

We uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and could hardly believe that what we saw was real.

"Yes, yes; it's all good gold, God be praised," cried the stockman, eagerly; "you thought that the old man was poor and destitute, but you see that I'm not. I've wealth, and it's all my own. God be praised."

"But how came you in possession of so much gold dust?" asked Fred; a slight suspicion crossing his mind that the old convict might have employed his leisure hours at a bushranger's occupation.

"Honestly, good youth, honestly. God knows all things, and he will acquit me of obtaining the dust otherwise."

"The amount is large for a person to possess who has received only a few dollars per year for his services as shepherd," Fred remarked.

"I know — I know," cried the old man, trembling with eagerness, and hastily taking up the bags again, and depositing them under the stone.

"I know," he continued, when he saw that the stone was safe in its accustomed place, "that the amount is large; and I mean to add to it,

and be rich, and have men bow to me, and say, 'There goes one of our most worthy men. He is worth a million.'"

The old convict actually straightened his lank body, and looked proudly upon his daughter, as he thought of the homage which he should receive as a wealthy man.

"But you have not told us how you became possessed of so much gold," Smith said, rather coolly.

"Never you mind how I got it—that is a secret. But be assured, one half goes to you on the day that you marry my daughter."

"I accept of the woman, but before the gold crosses my palm, I must know that it was ——"

Smith hesitated, for he did not like to wound the old man's feelings.

"You would say honestly," cried the stockman, looking Smith full in the face with his calm, gray eyes. "I like you better for your reluctance to receive a portion with your wife until you know that you can use it with honor. Be assured that you can do so."

"Convince me of the fact by relating how it came into your possession, and I am satisfied," returned Smith.

"O James, James, have mercy," murmured the distressed daughter, who was a witness of the scene.

The sturdy Smith resisted her appeal, and did not withdraw his eyes from the face of the stockman, who seemed slightly discomposed at the pertinacity of his intended son-in-law.

The old man hesitated and muttered to himself, and at length appeared to recover sufficient confidence to speak.

"Will all three of you solemnly promise me that you will not divulge the secret which I am about to impart?" he demanded.

"We will readily give our consent, because we have fought too many battles, side by side, to injure a friend, even if he has been guilty of imprudence," he replied.

"And will you also promise not to interfere with my plans, and demand to share my profits?" he asked.

We smiled, for we thought how little he was capable of coping with the energy and enterprise of ourselves.

"I see that you consent," he cried; "and now for the friend that yielded all the wealth which I possess. Follow me a short distance."

He led the way at a rapid pace towards the small stream which we had crossed so many times, and near the very spot where we had encamped on our first visit to that part of the country.

"There is where I obtained my gold," he said, stopping suddenly, and pointing with his hand towards the bank of the stream.

"You are misleading us," I said, not knowing what he meant.

"So help me, Heaven, I am not. Here, on the banks of the stream, I have dug and washed thousands of pans full of earth, and yet no living soul ever saw me at work. Here did I collect my gold, a shilling's worth at a time, some days, and on other occasions by the ounce, until I gained what I possess. I have toiled for it during heat and wet, and every grain that you saw was obtained that way."

We were silent from wonder, and could hardly realize that he spoke the truth. At length, Fred remarked,—

"For months, then, you have been aware of the existence of gold in this particular spot?"

"Not only in one spot, but all along the stream can gold be found. Even where you stand scales of dust can be obtained. The earth is full of treasure, and requires but little stirring to enrich all who choose to work."

"Then there is no occasion for us to go farther," I said; "here will we rest and try our luck."

"You can't," shrieked the old man, shaking his withered hands, and gesticulating violently. "You have promised not to interfere with my work, and I hold you to your word. To me belongs the exclusive right of mining on this land. I cannot share it with strangers."

"Why, how unreasonable and selfish you are, to exclude us from the privileges which you enjoy!" returned Fred, angrily.

"Not so," replied the old man, somewhat mortified. "Let a rumor reach Melbourne that gold is to be found by the side of this small stream, and thousands of adventurers will flock here. My sheep would be driven off or destroyed — the stream would be dried up, for there is hardly water enough to supply my animals at the present time. Men would perish with thirst, and cut each other's throats in their despair. My home would be invaded, and the old man forced from the ground, and perhaps lose his all while struggling in the race for wealth."

There was too much truth in the old man's words, and we were not disposed to gainsay them. Still, we did not like to relinquish a chance for money-making, and therefore we were disposed to argue the question.

"Here are days," we said, "when not a team or a foot passenger passes this way. We could always be on the watch, and as soon as we saw strangers we could desist from digging. Besides, then you would have us near you to protect and look after your interest. Consider how much we could assist you."

"I considered every thing," replied the old man, with a shake of his gray head, as though he was determined not to be convinced. "I knew that, unless I exacted a solemn promise, you would be wild to take advantage of my information. But I know your hearts, and am well aware that you will not struggle against an old man's wishes."

"Our company is disagreeable to you, then," Fred said. "We will not force ourselves upon you, be assured. In an hour's time we shall turn our backs upon the place, and probably never return."

"Come, come," cried the old convict, extending his hand, which we were in no hurry to accept. "You are angry with me, and yet you have no just cause, for I would expose my life to assist you. You are richer than I, and need not quarrel with an old friend for the sake of working from the earth a few scales of gold. Let me remain here in peace for the present, without being elbowed by strangers."

"We are agreed," I replied, pressing the stockman's hand; and as we did so, a vision of his services rose before us, and amply rewarded us for the slight sacrifice which we had made.

"Now," cried the stockman, "we are friends again; and to prove that I am such, before noon I will place in your hands the bag of gold which we came so near losing night before last."

"Ah, now we are convinced that you have our interest at heart," Fred said, joyfully. "Let us but touch the treasure and you shall share with us."

"I want no share — I've been repaid, ay, more than repaid, in obtaining my freedom through your instrumentality, and if I can make some return I shall be happy."

We no longer stopped to discuss the question of working upon his claim, and in less than ten minutes after our return to the hut, we had saddled our horses, and leaving Smith to follow with his oxen, for the purpose of bringing home his half-consumed cart, we started once more towards the still smoking woods.

The hot winds of Australia, which begin about ten o'clock in the forenoon, swept over the prairie with a blast that felt like the flames of an extensive conflagration, and yet we heeded it not, for our whole thoughts were fixed, like greedy misers, upon the gold which we were soon to acquire, and we speculated what we should do with our wealth, and how expend it.

We urged our panting horses to their utmost speed, and not until the old stockman cried out to us to draw up, or we should exhaust the brutes, did we allow them to take breath.

"There's no use in being in such a hurry," he said, "because we are near the spot, and have all the afternoon to get home."

In fact, even while he was speaking he dismounted near Smith's cart, and we quickly followed his example.

"When I made my escape from the bushrangers, and carried off the gold, I recollected that I had seen a stone near this spot, and that some kind of animal had burrowed under it. The knowledge served me a good turn, for when I gained the edge of the woods I scraped away a little dirt and dropped the bag into the hole. Then I rapidly covered it, and entered the forest again undiscovered."

While he was speaking our eyes had wandered in search of the rock which he was mentioning, and within a rod of us we found it. We hardly waited to hear the conclusion of his words before we had pushed aside the loose dirt, and saw the soiled canvas bag which we had taken from the earth on the day of our capture.

We raised it carefully from its hiding-place, and found that the weight had not diminished. With eager hands we untied the strings, and exposed to our longing eyes the glittering scales of gold dust, mixed with gold coins, sovereigns, and American ten and twenty dollar pieces.

"Well," asked the stockman, "how much do you think you are worth now?"

The old fellow was as cool as an iceberg, and offered a striking contrast to our excitement.

"Twenty thousand dollars," replied Fred, weighing the bag with both hands; and no easy matter he found it to hold the gold at arm's length.

"More than that," replied the stockman, with a smile of gratified pride at our pleasure. "Say thirty thousand, and you will come nearer the mark."

"Five thousand shall go to reward you for your trouble," I said.

"Not a penny will I accept," he answered, quickly and decidedly; "I told you that some time ago. I plead poverty because I did not wish

people to consider me rich, and I suppose by that means I have saved my life; for if the marauders of these parts knew me to possess gold, my hut would have been turned inside out, but that it would have been discovered. No, no; keep your money, and may you do good with it."

We mounted our horses again, and hugging the bag of gold to my saddle bow, as though fearful I should meet bushrangers to dispute my right to it at every step, we recrossed the prairie, meeting Smith on the way, to whom we imparted our good fortune, and received his congratulations. By three o'clock the gold was safe under the hearthstone, and then we breathed free, and felt that we indeed owned it.

By six o'clock Smith joined us with his dilapidated cart, when we immediately commenced repairing it, and getting ready for our journey towards Ballarat.

By the ingenious use of tree limbs, we were enabled to repair it sufficiently to carry all of our freight; and after it was loaded on, we ate our supper, and prepared for an early start.

The gold, which we were so glad to obtain possession of, troubled us, however. We did not like to risk its safety with us, for we knew that the population of Ballarat were wild and lawless, and we were rather fearful of losing our treasure, now that we possessed it. We consulted with Smith, and came to the conclusion that the safest place was with the honest old stockman, buried beneath his stone hearth. He readily accepted of the trust, and promised to deliver it only upon a written order, signed by both of us, and with a private mark upon the paper.

With Smith we settled according to what we considered a liberal reward. The honest fellow refused, at first, to accept of any thing, saying that he had only performed his duty, and that he was still in our debt; but we would not listen to such reasoning, and weighed out five thousand dollars, as his share, for losses sustained, and time expended.

After that matter was settled, we retired to sleep, and only awakened to partake of a substantial breakfast, for which, I have always suspected, we were indebted to the kind consideration Smith was held in by Mrs. Becky. At any rate, every thing that we could desire was spread before us; and when we shook hands with the old stockman and his daughter, I observed that Smith held the woman's hand with a firm grasp, as though reluctant to relinquish it.

Our friends waved an adieu, Smith cracked his whip, and sighed, Rover barked joyfully, as he saw preparations for moving, Fred and myself cautioned the stockman, for the last time, to be careful of our gold, and then we were off; and in half an hour's time had shut out the hut behind a miniature hill, the first which we had seen for many days.

For two days we travelled, meeting teams and vehicles of all descriptions, owned by uncouth individuals, who asked us the news from Melbourne, and ridiculed us when we said that we didn't know the price of ale and beer, or what flour was worth per ton.

As we advanced towards the mining district, the road was filled with people flocking that way, while hundreds were on their return to Melbourne or Sydney.

Wan, ghastly looking men were groaning upon the bottom of carts destitute of springs. Others, hardly able to lift their feet, were stag-

gering along for some city where they could receive the attentions of a physician, being too poor to employ one at the mines, and too destitute to ride towards civilization.

Occasionally we saw a poor wretch by the roadside, who had apparently lain down to die, too exhausted to proceed upon his journey; while others hailed us, and begged us, in God's name, for a swallow of wine, or other stimulant, to cheer them on their way.

Long before we reached Ballarat our slender stock of liquors was exhausted, and yet we had not administered to the wants of one half of those who sought aid. Indeed, had we listened to all who begged, our provisions would also have disappeared, and we should have had to trust to our purses to replenish our supply.

Smith was an old campaigner in these regions, and checked our generosity, by giving us a few words of advice, which we afterwards found were correct.

On we went, the road growing worse and worse as we advanced, and as the wheels sunk into the deep ruts, I thought the wagon would be shattered to pieces in the struggle to extricate it. Dozens of teams were stuck, and despite the yells and curses of the drivers, the tired cattle refused to move.

Smith's oxen, the freshest and strongest we had seen on the road, were often borrowed to give distressed teamsters a lift, so that our progress was rather slow; and it was not until five o'clock that we entered the town of Ballarat, and passed along the main street, which was graced with huts and tents of rough boards, on each side.

On we went, passing the "Melbourne Saloon," the "Sydney Saloon," the "London Hotel," the "American Hotel," the "Californians' Retreat," and numbers of other tents, decorated with huge letters of black paint, and all setting forth the peculiar merits which each offered to the weary traveller.

At one place, we were told that real London porter could be obtained for ten shillings per bottle; and at another, that XX ale was selling for only one shilling per glass.

Signs innumerable greeted our eyes. Doctors, who informed the public that their charges were only one pound per visit, cash in advance to save trouble; carpenters, who offered to build houses at the cheapest rate; carriers, willing to freight goods to any part of Australia, and would not guarantee a safe delivery — all these were passed by without attracting any attention, although the scene was one of novelty and excitement to us.

We gained a portion of the town that was comparatively clear of tents, and near a stream of water. Here Smith thought we had better stop; and tired, and perhaps homesick, we pitched our tent, and ate our first supper at the mines of Ballarat.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Bully of Ballarat. — Fred fights a Duel.

Horse stealing is not regarded as a very serious crime, I regret to say, in Australia. There is a certain class of people who make no scruple of borrowing an animal without the owner's consent, and if great objection is made to such a proceeding, a resort to fircarms quickly settles the matter, generally to the disadvantage of the remonstrant.

The mines are overrun with ruffians, who have no fear of law, and can only be kept in awe by courage superior to their own. Of this we were quickly made acquainted, as we were considered, by the old residents, green, having but recently arrived, and not yet learned the mysteries of Ballarat.

The first case occurred even before we had finished our supper, and perhaps gave us a better insight into the manners and customs of the miners than we could have otherwise learned for months.

I have already said that Fred and myself rode two fine horses, formerly owned by the police department of Melbourne. The animals, owing to the care which we had taken of them during our journey, were in capital order, and worth full as much money as when we first purchased them.

As we had understood that horseflesh was scarce and dear at the mines, we had determined to hold on to the brutes for a few days, and then, if we liked Ballarat, and were disposed to locate there, we had resolved to sell them, to save expense of keeping — no inconsiderable item, where to turn a horse out to pasture was to lose sight of him forever, and where barley was worth about ten dollars a hundred.

We were leisurely sipping our coffee, after looking to the comfort of the animals, having fed and rubbed them down, and allowed them to drink their fill of water, when a thick-set, black-bearded man, evidently partially intoxicated, came swaggering towards us. He wore a blue flannel shirt, open at the neck, exposing a chest brawny enough for Hercules; and around his waist was a leather belt, such as is worn by sailors on shipboard. In the belt was a long knife on one side, and on the other a pistol of mammoth dimensions; but it looked to me as though more dangerous to the holder than the one who stood before it, for the stock was broken, and the barrel rusty and neglected.

Thus equipped, the ruffian — for we could see that he was a ruffian in every movement and in every line of his animal face — swaggered towards us, nodded to Smith in a patronizing manner, and after a broad stare of half-defiance and half-wonder at Fred and myself, — an act of impertinence of which we took no notice, — he began examining the animals as though he was a connoisseur in horseflesh.

We apparently paid no attention to his movements, and continued discussing our private affairs, and sipping our coffee. Rover, who was sharing our meal, once or twice showed his teeth, and manifested a dis-

position to commence hostilities; but we silenced him, and thought that we would let the fellow operate for a few moments without remonstrance.

"Who is he?" we asked of Smith.

"The worst man in Ballarat. He is called the bully of the mines, and it is as much as a man's life is worth to anger him. His real name is Pete Burley; he served out his time for breaking a man's head and then robbing him, in London. Say nothing to him, but if he speaks, answer him civilly."

This was all spoken in a tone not above a whisper, and we began to think that the fellow was indeed dangerous, if a man like Smith displayed signs of fear in his presence.

After Mr. Pete had satisfied himself which horse possessed the best bottom, he turned towards us, and condescended to honor us with his attention.

"Is them hosses yourn?" he inquired, with a growl, as though the effort of asking a question was painful.

Fred intimated that they belonged to us, and that he considered them, confidentially, fine animals.

"I want to use this ere one, to-night; where's the saddle and fixins?"

"Let him have the animal," whispered Smith, without raising his eyes; "it's better than having trouble with him."

The advice was intended for our benefit, but the Yankee blood which coursed through Fred's veins was opposed to such an inglorious acquiescence.

"You don't intend to take the animal without asking our consent, do you?" inquired Fred, mildly.

The ruffian actually looked astonished, and for a moment did not reply, so bewildered did he seem.

"Have you told them fellers who I is?" asked Pete, appealing to Smith.

"I don't think that I have," replied Smith, hurriedly; "it's all right, Pete; you can have the horse, if you want him."

"If it's all right, I've no more to say; but if it's not all right, I can make it right, d—d quick," the ruffian said, still looking towards us, as though he should like to see a little opposition, just for the sake of showing us who he really was.

"My friend, here," said Fred, pointing to Smith, "is slightly mistaken in what he says. I own the horse you have selected for a ride, and I have objections against loaning him to strangers. You can't have him."

Fred was as cool as ever I saw him in my life. He reached over to the coffee-pot while he was speaking, and deliberately helped himself to coffee, sweetened it to his fancy, and then drank it, without showing the least agitation.

To my surprise, the ruffian, instead of answering Fred's speech, burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which lasted for some minutes.

"If this 'ere ain't jolly!" he said, after recovering his breath; "why, you fools, don't you know me? hain't you ever heard of me afore? I'm Pete Burley, the bully of Ballarat, and can lick any two men in the

mines! Bah, greenies, don't be putting on airs afore you've been in this ere town two hours. Where's this hoss's bridle?"

"I have told you once," replied Fred, a small, red spot beginning to appear on each cheek, "that the animal is not at your disposal. We are strangers here, it is true, but we are not disposed to be imposed upon."

"Now, I've half a mind to hammer the whole party till you're black and blue, and then drive you from the mines. Why, you fools, who am I? what do you take me for? am I a fighting man or not?" roared the ruffian, his eyes beginning to grow bloodshot, and his bloated face livid with rage.

By this time, a large number of idlers began to gather around, and listen to the altercation of words. None of them seemed disposed to interfere, although I saw that the mass were too much under the influence of Bully to say a word in our favor, while half a dozen sycophant curs boldly encouraged him in his course of aggression, and whispered to each other, that we should soon knuckle into "nuggets," when the bully got fairly awakened.

We paid no attention to the crowd, but continued to keep our seats and sip our coffee; but when we saw that Pete was determined to carry off the horse at any rate, we concluded that it was time to interfere in earnest.

The bully had begun to unfasten the halter which held the horse, when Fred and myself rose to our feet. The crowd kept at a respectful distance, for they knew that Bully was a man who did not stop to consider who were for or against him, when in a rage, and that he had been known to discharge a pair of pistols in the midst of a party of friends, if he felt that it was necessary to keep up his reputation for fierceness and decision. Under such circumstances, there is but little cause to wonder why men were not disposed to press forward for the purpose of listening and offering assistance.

As I said before, Pete had begun to untie the halter, and the crowd applauded in approbation of his firmness. He held the strap in one hand, when Fred and myself, followed by Smith at a short distance, reached the spot.

"I have told you once, that you cannot have my horse!" cried Fred, firmly and decidedly; "will you have the extreme goodness to let him alone?"

"Look here, you cussed counter-jumper," roared the bully; "if you utter another word, I'll make you eat the hoss and saddle, and then boot you out of town in the bargain. I'm going to have a ride; so stand aside, and don't interfere with me."

He was walking off with the animal, when Fred laid his hand upon the halter. The ruffian turned suddenly, and aimed a blow at Fred's head that would have crushed his skull, had he not quickly avoided it, and allowed the huge fist to pass within a few inches of his face.

The impetus of the blow turned the bully half round, so that he exactly faced Fred, and for a moment he was off his guard; that opportunity was improved by my friend, who saw his advantage.

Quick as lightning, I saw Fred's right hand raised, and with a "square shoulder hit," such as would have felled an ox, he let it fall full upon Bully's face.

I saw the dark blood spurt out from beneath the eye of Pete, and I heard a crunching sound, as though bones were broken; but before I had time to think, the ruffian staggered, swung his arms aloft, and pitched heavily to the earth.

"By G—d, that was a Yankee blow," yelled a rough-looking genius, who had regarded the scene with great composure during the war of words. "Them fellers is Yankees, and my countrymen, and they is going to have fair play if I can get it. Stand back, all of you, and let us have this thing out. Bob," our new ally said, speaking to a friend, "you just run down to the Californe Saloon, and tell the boys a Yankee is in trouble, and needs help; and mind and tell 'um that they needn't stop to draw the charge of their revolvers."

The person addressed as Bob hastened from the spot; but before I could reward our new friend with a word of thanks, Pete, who had lain as if stunned for a few moments, began to show signs of reviving.

"We must look out for his pistol," said our rough friend, stepping from the crowd, and approaching me. "He will be certain to use it if he is not too groggy."

The words were prophetic; for hardly had the fallen man looked around, after rubbing his eye, when the whole transaction appeared to flash upon his mind.

"I have been struck," he yelled, springing to his feet, and stamping the ground in his rage. "Where is the man that dared to lay a hand upon me? Show him to me, and his blood shall run like water."

"Put up your pistol, Pete," said our new friend, laying his hand upon that weapon, which Burley had drawn, and was about to cock. "You begun this 'ere quarrel, and you are not going to use the barkers without giving the other side a chance. Is it a regular stand up and take match that you want, or do you like ten paces better? If you are for fight, you can be accommodated; but the fellow that fires the first shot, without a signal, dies, if there's any virtue in a revolver."

"A fight, a fight," yelled the outsiders, and even while they were cheering, I saw a dozen or twenty brawny-limbed fellows break through the crowd and rush into the ring.

"We just got word from you, Charley, that an American wanted fair play. Who is he?" asked one of the new comers; and by his peculiar dialect, I knew him for a native of old Vermont.

"These two 'Mericans have been pitched into by Pete Burley, 'cos they won't let him have their hoss. I happened 'long and saw the whole of it, and I tell you it was butfully done, and no mistake. The Yankee give him Jesse, and yet he fetched him only one winder."

"We'll stick by you, and no mistake," cried our generous countryman, standing between the bully and Fred, for fear that the former should do him some harm. "The fellow is a nuisance, and ought to be kicked from the mines, for he makes his living by sponging and stealing."

"Come, Burley," cried the American addressed as Charley, "is it a fair stand up fight that you want, or an exchange of shots? Our countryman will accommodate you with either, I have no doubt."

"I want his blood; d—— him, I'll have his heart out of him," yelled the ruffian, who was also surrounded by a small circle of admirers. "He has struck me, and I want revenge."

"Well, don't cry about it," cried Charley, quite jocular. "I suppose that there will be no trouble in satisfying you. What say? shall I make arrangements for a meeting, so that you can have a pop at each other?" he continued, addressing Fred.

"The fact of it is," Charley said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "the fellow is a bloodthirsty wretch, and has committed more than half a dozen murders, yet they cannot be brought home to him. You have struck him, and he will take your life on the first opportunity. You had better shoot him, and get him out of the way. I will explain the matter to the government inspector, and there will be nothing said about the matter."

"But you forget that the ruffian may shoot me," replied Fred, with a smile.

"Well, the fact of it is, I disremembered that. But I'll tell you what I will do, if you think it will be of any consolation to you. If he hits you, I'll challenge him, and revenge your loss."

"I am much obliged to you, certainly," Fred replied; "but I won't request you to put your life in danger on my account. If you think I am bound to give satisfaction for the blow, please act in connection with my friend as my second."

"We'll arrange it, never fear," Charley said, with great readiness, as though the meeting was one of the most natural things in the world.

Cowards are always fickle, and can be swayed by good or bad success. Those who a few minutes before were silent, or encouraged the English bully in his course, now left his ranks, arrayed themselves upon our side, and many a hand, rough and hard with toil, was stretched out for us to grasp and receive congratulations.

"Faith, Mr. Yankee," whispered a Hibernian to Fred, "ef ye can kill the divil, do so wid all your heart, for a bigger thief never lived. He stole me boots day afore yesterday, and the spalpeen refuses to return 'um."

"He licked me last week," said another, in an under tone, "and if you think you can afford to beat him for a pound, I'll give it, readily."

"When you aim at him, be sure to fire a second afore the word is given," cried another new, but not very conscientious friend. "It's a trick the bully is up to, and it's that way he treated poor Billy Hanes, who accused him of stealing his dust. Do as I bid you, and you'll be all right."

"We've fixed it," cried California Charley, as he was called by the crowd, interrupting the confidential advice which Fred was receiving. "We have concluded to let Burley have a shot to heal his wounded honor, as he calls his black eye. A devilish bad looking peeper he has got, and a stunning blow you must have given him to have produced such an effect."

"When is it to come off?" I asked, almost trembling for Fred.

"We have decided that it shall take place immediately, 'cos it would be cruel to disappoint the crowd assembled. They expect a duel, and we must gratify them. If you are successful, you will be the most popular man in Ballarat, and there is no knowing what is in store for you."

"What weapons are we to use?" Fred asked.

"Revolvers, to be sure. I've promised to let the fellow use mine for

the sake of placing him on an equality with you. I see that you have a revolver, so that I know you will be able to shoot better with it than a strange pistol. But remember, we have no fooling about the affair. I never stand second for a man unless he tries to win, and I should hate to think that you were foolish enough to throw away your fire. Do you kill him the first time, or he will kill you."

Fred thanked our countryman for his advice, and for a moment we conferred together apart.

"The same directions which I gave you when I was compelled to fight my first duel, will answer for this," Fred said. "If any thing should happen, don't let me be buried near this place. Carry my body to the old convict's hut, and let me be interred there by the side of the stream."

I promised, although there were tears in my eyes and a choking sensation in my throat, as I did so.

"Don't give way to any weakness, here," Fred whispered. "Remember that the eyes of a thousand people are upon us. Let them see that we possess the true Yankee grit."

He squeezed my hand as he spoke, and the next instant I was restored to my usual calmness, as far as the prying eyes which were fastened upon us could discover.

"Am I to be kept waiting all day for the young feller to say his prayers?" roared the bully, who began to grow impatient for blood.

"Don't let him call again," said Charley; "if he does, the people will think we are rather backward to meet him. Sympathy is now all on our side, and we must not lose it."

"I am ready," replied Fred, after a brief inspection of his revolver.

"That's right — are you certain that those caps are not damp? Do you want any thing? Can I do any thing for you?"

With these questions, and half a dozen others in the same breath, which Charley asked as rapidly as though there was not a moment to spare, Fred was conducted near his adversary, who uttered an exclamation when he saw him, that was intended for an intimidation.

"Where shall I hit the d——d Yankee?" he cried, brandishing his pistol. "I'll pepper him just where you tell me to, and afterwards we'll drink his speedy passage to —— "

The balance of the exclamation was so shocking that his only friend checked him by asking if his pistol was well loaded.

"It's loaded well enough to kill that d——d pup. I say, what a joke it will be! I kill a d——d Yankee with a Yankee's pistol. I suppose they want to thin the breed off."

The bully's words, instead of intimidating Fred, had a contrary effect, for I saw by his eyes that his mind was made up, and all feeling of compassion was banished from his bosom.

"You're to stand off twenty paces," Charley said, speaking to Fred; "I had some thoughts of making the distance less, but I was afraid to trust you so near, considering that you are a new beginner."

Fred glanced at me and smiled. The Californian little thought that he was acting as second to a man whose reputation as a hunter of bush-rangers was the theme of every miner's discourse, and that the newspapers of Australia had spread our fame all over the island.

"You need not fear that I shall disgrace your patronage," Fred said. "I have seen an enemy's front before to-day."

"Gad, I begin to think that you have," Charley cried, noticing that his man displayed no sign of tremulousness.

"Stand one side, gentlemen," cried the Californian. "Our men are going to fire."

"Let me get in front of them — that's the safest place," roared out some joker.

"It's pluck the Yankee is," cried our Hibernian friend. "See, he don't look a bit like running away."

"Five to one that Burley hits at the first fire," cried a sporting man.

"Done," yelled the Irishman. "How much does ye wish to come down?"

"Five pound to two that neither is killed at the first fire," roared another.

"Make it mortally wounded, and Jim's your customer," replied an anxious miner, producing his small bag of gold to cover the stake.

"I'll go this nugget that the Yankee hits his man at the first fire," cried one fellow, holding up a lump of virgin gold as large as a hen's egg.

"I'll take it — I'll take it," a number of voices replied, and straightway there was a rush towards him.

"Jim," cried our bully opponent, "do you go into the crowd and take a few bets on my account, as I am in want of money, and *after* I've killed this young sprig of insolence, I intend to go on a spree. Take all the odds offered."

I saw no one accept of the mission, so I concluded that the ruffian's words were merely intended as capital for the crowd, accessions to which were constantly increasing.

"Come," said Fred, speaking to Charley; "let us have this concluded as soon as possible, or the whole town of Ballarat will be here to witness it."

"That is just what I want," replied our new-found friend, with great coolness. "If you are fortunate enough to kill the bully, — and I am sure I hope you will be, — every one who sees him fall will swear that the fight was a beautiful one, and that every thing was perfectly fair and just; while those who did not, will vow that murder has been committed, and urge the commissioner to arrest you. It's a great satisfaction sometimes to see a duel, and it's only right and proper that as many as possible should be gratified with the sport."

"But it appears to me that the population of the town is all here now," remonstrated Fred.

"There's where you are mistaken," replied Charley; "the news has hardly reached the miners in the shafts, and that class of people will feel deeply grieved unless they are among the spectators."

"There comes a gang of men," I said, calling the Californian's attention to thirty or forty, who, to judge by soiled garments, had just come from the bowels of the earth.

"Yes, there are some of the underground miners, and a rough set they are. Will you hurry up?" Charley shouted, "or are we to wait here all night?"

"Why weren't we called afore?" asked one of the party. "This don't look like the old style of doing things, I must say."

"I got word to you as quick as I could, and what more can I do? It's all owing to me that you got an invite at all. This young feller don't know our customs, and wanted to bang away afore any one was here," replied my assistant second.

"Did you tell him how we managed things?" asked the leading miner, gravely, as though a breach of etiquette had been committed of the rudest kind.

"Of course I did," replied Charley, with alacrity. "You don't think I'd forget my duty?"

"And what answer did the young feller make?" inquired the miner, as though a great deal was attached to Fred's reply.

"He said that he was ready to comply with the customs of Ballarat, and that he would wait a fortnight, if necessary, to allow the shaft miners to get out to see the fun."

"He said that, did he?" asked the spokesman, nodding his head with pleasure.

"Of course he did; and let me tell you he is one of 'em," Charley exclaimed, with enthusiasm.

"I believe ye, and the fight can go on without any further delay, after I've filled my pipe and lighted it."

We watched the miner as he slowly cut his tobacco and stuffed it into his pipe, and then, with great deliberation, sheltered it with his hands while he lighted it with a match.

"Now I'm comfortable — let the fight go on."

As soon as the miner, who appeared to have great authority over the crowd, uttered these words, there was a scattering on every side to get out of range of the bullets. The people fell back and left the two principals with their seconds in a double line, which extended for some distance.

"Let us shake hands again," said Fred, as the two men were brought into position. "You, too, Smith, are entitled to my thanks, and a farewell."

"Don't say that — God knows I did all that I could to keep you apart."

"I know that you did," replied Fred, with a smile; "but we have no time to talk of such matters. Stand one side, for I see the crowd and my opponent are impatient to smell blood."

Smith fell back, and I slowly and reluctantly followed him.

"Gentlemen," cried the Californian, taking his station about midway between the principals, "you are to fire when I say 'fire,' and not before. The man who discharges his pistol before the word is given shall get the contents of half a dozen different revolvers."

This piece of intelligence appeared to disconcert Burley, for he whispered to his second, and they glanced suspiciously towards the crowd.

"There'll be no firing afore the time at this fight," I heard the man say who had requested us to be on the watch for the bully.

"Now, then, gentlemen, are you ready?" asked Charley.

"Ready for half an hour past, 'cos I've got to be at old Steve's at eight o'clock," returned Burley.

The crowd cheered him for his spunk, as they termed it, and when Fred only bowed to the question, and pulled his hat a little more over his eyes, the Californian's party applauded.

"Now, then, remember what I told you. Are you ready?"

Both men cocked their pistols, and aimed as though they meant mischief.

"Fire!" thundered the Californian.

I heard a bullet whiz past me, and I saw that Fred stood firm upon his legs, and then I had just time to look towards the bully to see him give a spring upward and fall heavily upon his face. The earth fairly shook as he struck it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ballarat Customs, after a Duel.

A WILD cheer, whether of joy or rage I could not tell, burst from the crowd as Burley fell. The vacant space which had been kept clear for duelling was filled at once by a struggling mass of people, all pressing towards the fallen bully to learn the result of his injuries.

Amidst all the confusion and struggling, our California friends managed to keep close to us, as though to afford protection in case we were molested by adherents of Burley. But no one appeared to assail us, while hundreds rushed up and shook our hands, and congratulated us on the result of the fight.

"It's well ye did it, by gar," cried our Hibernian acquaintance; "niver fear but ye is all right now. I'll fight for ye, mind, for faith, I've won a nugget on ye."

"Take your men off the ground, Charley," said the stout miner, who appeared to exercise such unlimited control over the crowd. "Take 'em off, and if they is wanted we know where to find 'em."

In obedience to this mandate we were forced off the ground towards our tent, and when we reached it we did not have to wait long for news. Indeed, we found some trouble in keeping people out, for crowds were wishing to get a sight of the man who tamed the bully of Ballarat; and had not our California friends reported that Fred was slightly wounded and desired time to have his hurts attended to, I verily believe he would have been paraded round the town on the shoulders of his enthusiastic admirers. While we were speculating on the result of the duel, and Fred was congratulating himself on getting off so cheap, Charley rushed in.

"Well, how much injured is Burley?" I asked.

"He is pretty badly hurt, but I reckon he'll get over it. The shot hit him on the hip, and if ever he does get well he'll be troubled in walking, I should think."

"Then there is a prospect of his recovering?" demanded Fred, anxiously.

"Well, I should think there was a right smart chance of his getting

on his pins in the course of time. It's hard killing such ugly customers, you know."

"I am thankful that he will not die by my hand," replied Fred, with his whole heart.

"Well, it's just as one fancies, you know. Now I shouldn't have thought it a great crime had the old scamp been peppered right through the heart. But, how's this?"

The eyes of Charley wandered around the tent as though he saw something that excited his suspicions. We looked at him with astonishment.

"It ain't the way the miners have been accustomed to be treated, and I'm sorry that I had any thing to do with the duel, 'cos I'll be blamed," Charley said, shaking his head, and looking as mournful as though he had just heard of the death of his grandfather.

"Will you be kind enough to tell us what you disapprove of," asked Fred, anxiously.

"Well, I hope that I'll be acquitted of all blame, and I want you to say so when the influential miners make their appearance," our new acquaintance said, still shaking his head and muttering to himself.

"Pray, what do you mean?" repeated Fred, beginning to feel a little nervous and a little angry at the same time.

"Well, I suppose you know something 'bout the customs of the miners, don't you?" Charley asked.

"I know nothing about your customs or laws, for I've been in Ballarat only two hours, and yet I've fought a duel and eaten supper, work enough for one man," Fred said.

"I forgive you," cried Charley, seizing our hands and shaking them in a sudden burst of friendship. "Say no more — I forgive you."

"For Heaven's sake, what have I done that deserves forgiveness on your part?" demanded Fred.

"Why, didn't you know that on occasions like these 'ere the survivor of a duel is expected to have a few refreshments set out in his tent, and that all the principal men of Ballarat will be here to take a drink?"

"I certainly was not acquainted with such an understanding, and I don't think that even my friend Smith, here, who has made many trips to Melbourne and the mines, ever heard of it," replied Fred.

Smith shook his head to intimate that he was in blissful ignorance, and just then one of the Californians, who acted as doorkeeper, put his head into the tent and shouted, —

"They're coming, Charley; are you ready for 'em?"

"You see," our friend said, with great coolness, "that something to drink is expected, and yet we have nothing to offer. What are we to do?"

"What have you been accustomed to do?" interrogated Fred, beginning to think that he had fallen among queer people, his countrymen included.

"Well, a gallon or two of gin, or the same amount of brandy, has always been considered as about right. It all depends on a man's circumstances. Now, you," and Charley fixed his eyes with great earnestness upon Fred's form while speaking, "I calculate, is worth something considerably handsome, and can afford to treat the boys pretty liberal."

"Is any thing more customary?" asked Fred, with a slight sneer.

"Well, sometimes, when it's a pretty bad case, I've known a feller to come down liberally with beer; but of course you can do as you please about that. They sell first rate at the Californe saloon — new tap, just arrived," and Charley's eyes sparkled at the prospect of getting a drink.

"Then, perhaps, as I and my friend are strangers here, you will do me the pleasure of acting as master of ceremonies, and order what you think fit."

"But you'll pay for the fixens, you know," our friend said, with true Yankee sagacity; and as he spoke he watched narrowly to see if the money was forthcoming to back up the request.

"Certainly," answered Fred, with a melancholy smile at the prospect before him. He drew from his pocket a number of gold pieces and handed them to Charley, who clutched them with avidity.

"I say, Bob," our California friend exclaimed, running to the entrance of the tent; "it's all right. Tell the folks to wait, and we'll have something to wet their whistles. He's come down handsomely, and no mistake."

"Any orders?" asked the fellow addressed as Bob.

"Yes, indeed; go down to my place and tell my partner that we'll be there in a few minutes, and that we intend to drink him dry afore morning."

"A pleasant prospect," I muttered, in an undertone, to Fred. "It seems that the fellow is proprietor of a saloon, and is determined that we shall pay him for his trouble by drinking all that he has got."

Charley intimated that he would show us the way, but Fred held back.

"Why can't you drink your ale without my presence?" he asked, impatiently.

"'Cos we don't approve of haristocracy here in Ballarat, and it would make the miners think that you didn't want to 'sociate with 'em. It wouldn't do."

"But if you should tell them that I am slightly injured, and need rest, wouldn't that have some effect?" Fred inquired, driven almost to desperation.

"Well, the only effect it would have you'd be obliged to receive the folks in your tent, and perhaps that would not be agreeable. But you can do jist as you please, remember. I've been at Ballarat for six months, and I should think I know'd the ideas and habits of the miners purty well."

"For Heaven's sake, let us go to your place without delay, and get through with the business. I've half a mind to turn my back upon Ballarat to-morrow," cried Fred.

"You won't do that, I reckon, while there's so much of the root of all evil in the ground. Why, I s'pose you come up here to get rich, and you is going jist the right way to work to do it. To-morrow you'll be the most popular man in the mines, and there's no telling what the boys may do for you. Perhaps send you a delegate to the governor-general, to ask him to clip off the taxes which we have to pay for digging gold. I tell you there's a brilliant future before you, so come along."

We could not resist such a plea, and, followed by about half a thousand miners, teamsters, and idlers, we gained the saloon owned by our friend, which proved to be the much vaunted "Californian Retreat."

The saloon was made of sail cloth, not exactly in the form of a tent, for a slight frame was visible of a square order, and to the joist was the cloth tacked. A few rough boards, evidently taken from boxes, formed the bar, or counter, and half a dozen shelves were nailed up behind it, composed of the same material.

On the shelves were a dozen or more black bottles, and three cracked tumblers stood upon the bar ready to use. A pitcher of water, that almost steamed with heat, was arrayed before the tumblers; but that, I imagine, was intended as an ornament, and not for use, for I did not observe, while I was at the mines, a man make use of such liquid to qualify his liquor. The merchants of Melbourne and the carriers of freight between the city and the mines saved them the trouble.

In the rear part of the saloon was a good sized Yankee stove, black with dirt and rust, the accumulation of many days' cooking, during which fried pork was the staple article; and it was evident that the presiding genius of the *cuisine* department had been regardless of how much fat was spilled, and how much dirt his patrons consumed.

Three or four berths, near the stove, shaped like those found in the steerage of a ship, completes a description of every thing in the Californian Retreat worthy of notice. In one of the berths I noticed a man who appeared to be very sick, for he hardly opened his eyes when the crowd which followed us to the saloon rushed in in a disorderly manner.

"Well," said our friend Charley, rubbing his hands with an air of great satisfaction, and glancing around his premises, "this looks snug, don't it?"

"Very," I answered, rather dryly.

"You won't find in all Ballarat a saloon that can begin to compare with this in point of neatness, and a supply of all the luxuries of the season. Our liquors are first rate, and no mistake; and although we is out of cigars, we have got some of the juiciest nigger-head that you ever seed."

The miner, who appeared to exercise such sway over his comrades, edged his way through the crowd.

"I came here," he said, "thinking that the duel feller had axed us to wet our whistles, but it 'pears that I am mistaken."

The speaker, now that I had time to study his countenance and appearance, I found was a man nearly six feet six inches high, broad across the shoulders, with a face massive and determined, yet not wanting indications of good nature.

"Don't be in such a stew, Ben," cried Charley, rushing towards him, and preventing his leaving the saloon. "The thing is all right. The dueller feller pays for all, and we're only waiting for my partner to roll in a keg of some of the slickest Yankee whiskey that was ever made in York State, I tell you."

"Is that so?" asked stout Ben, as he was called, and his face appeared to express satisfaction at the news. "That is r-e-l-i-a-b-l-e, I 'spose, Charley?"

"My word for it, Ben. But come and shake hands with Burley's tamer, and encourage the youngster with your patronage."

The giant drew the back of his hand across his mouth as though it was watering for the whiskey, but after a slight urging, the second time he suffered Charley to conduct him to the corner of the saloon, where Fred, Smith, and myself were standing, receiving congratulations from all who wanted a drink of liquor free of cost.

"This is the chap, Ben," Charley said, nodding towards Fred, and that was all the introduction which was deemed necessary.

"I am happy to know you," said Fred, grasping a hand that was about the size of a shoulder of mutton, and twice as hard and nubby.

"You did putty well with Burley, and I am glad of it," Ben replied, shutting his fist and compressing Fred's hand for what he intended as a gentle squeeze — but I could see by my friend's face that he would be very glad when it was relinquished.

"A fine shot you made of it, sir," Ben said, not noticing that he had inflicted a large amount of pain.

"Is the poor fellow badly hurt?" asked Fred.

"Well, he's got an ugly hole in him, and it's hard hunting — the sawbones will have to find the lead."

"I hope that he will live," repeated Fred. "I did not seek his life, and I should be sorry to think that an act of mine sent him from the world with all his sins unrepented of."

"Never you mind about that," replied Ben. "If a feller wants to take your heart out, you've got the right to say to that feller, you don't come it; and if the feller still persists, you is bound to act on the defensive, and either lick him or kill him, I don't care which. I jinerally lick 'em."

As I glanced at the sturdy limbs of the giant miner I thought that he would be apt to meet but few men who would not prefer the shooting to the licking.

"You often have trouble here in Ballarat?" Fred asked.

"Well, no, I can't say that I see much of it. Sometimes the fellers make a rumpus, but they generally let me alone, and that's all I ax of 'em. But whar's that 'ere licker we's to have? 'Pears to me it's rather slow in getting 'long."

"Here it comes," shouted Charley, bustling around the crowded room, if, indeed, room it could be called. "I had to wait for it to be unloaded, Ben, 'cos it arrived only an hour or two ago from Sydney."

"You say it's the real New York first proof whiskey, do ye?" asked Ben, holding a tumbler two thirds full of the stuff up to the light, and scanning its color with a critical eye.

"The real thing, and no mistake. It's just sich as you used to git when chopping away down in the backwoods of Maine," replied Charley.

We then discovered, what we had all along suspected, that the miner was an American, and belonged in the Eastern State.

"Come, ain't you fellers a goin' to drink with us? That ain't exactly the thing, you know. There ain't no aristocracy in these parts. Every feller is free and equal, as the old Constitution of the States says."

We could not withstand Ben's pressing intimation that we were to

consider ourselves no better than others present, and after waiting five minutes for a chance at a glass, we managed to swallow a few mouthfuls of the vile stuff.

"That's the ticket!" he cried, when he saw that we were disposed to follow his example; "nothing like good whiskey to keep a man all right at the mines. I don't drink much myself, but I've no objections to other people taking a nip now and then."

As he spoke, he held out his glass for another nip, and the attentive Charley, with an eye to his profits, quickly filled it.

"I give you," said Ben, appealing to the crowd for silence — for most of the miners had grown talkative, under the influence of their drink — "I give you a toast. Here's to the tax, and d—— the man that wouldn't d—— it!"

The toast was received with yells of applause, and even when the confusion was at its height, I noticed a small, dark-complexioned man, wearing a blue frock coat with brass buttons, but with no other insignia of office or authority, enter the room.

His presence was not noticed by the crowd, which still continued its revels, until the new comer approached us, when a death-like silence crept over the assembly.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the dark man, addressing Fred and myself in a courteous manner; "I belive that you are recent arrivals?"

"Not more than three hours since," I replied, returning his salutation.

"I believe you have stated the hours correctly," he returned, dryly; "we live fast, here in Ballarat, yet I think you have outstripped us by your activity."

"No one can regret the circumstance which has taken place more than myself," replied Fred.

"Perhaps not," answered the dark man with a grim smile; and while he was speaking, I noticed that those in the saloon edged towards us for the purpose of hearing our conversation.

"The quarrel was occasioned by a dispute about horses, I believe?" the little man said.

"You are correct in your suppositions," returned Fred.

"Will you be kind enough to inform me how those animals came in your possession?" interrogated the stranger.

"I don't know what business it is of yours," returned Fred, with some asperity; "but as we seek to disguise nothing, I will frankly inform you that we purchased the horses and paid for them."

"A likely story, truly; I never yet knew the police of Melbourne to sell their spare horses."

At these words, we saw that the crowd looked at each other suspiciously, and appeared to regard us as being guilty of some serious crime.

"When you show us your authority for asking questions, we will explain matters," I replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Perhaps you will explain before it suits your convenience," the little man said, ironically; "I heard of the quarrel and the duel which one of you has been engaged in, and while investigating, I took occasion to look at the horses which you rode. You will imagine that I was surprised to discover that each animal had upon his hind quarter

the private mark of the police of Melbourne. I repeat, sir, that the authorities of that city are not in the habit of selling horses to adventurers."

The little man spoke confidently, and glanced around the crowd to see if his words were having an effect upon his audience. Thinking that he would complete our humiliation, he continued: —

"Our worthy miners here at Ballarat, have sometimes been put to great trouble by losing the dust which they have sent to the cities, and I think that I am right in demanding, in their name, a strict account of all suspicious people who visit us."

This was a shrewd bit of acting on the part of the little man, for he instantly carried all the miners with him. Hardly one present but had suffered at the hands of the bushrangers, and was anxious to avenge his loss.

"Let the fellers show who they is," the crowd began to murmur; and even our former friend, Charley, I observed, joined in the cry, while Ben remained silent, and drank two more glasses of whiskey during the tumult.

"It is evident that you suspect us of being bushrangers," observed Fred, coolly.

"I certainly think that you are," returned the little man, bluntly; "and it is a matter of surprise to me that I see you in the company of a man who has, during his trading at the mines, borne a good character."

This was a hard dig at Smith, and he sought to explain, but Fred checked him.

"If we should prove to you that we are honest men, I suppose that you would be willing to make an ample apology for the manner in which you have addressed us?" Fred said.

The little man smiled sarcastically, and intimated that he should be most happy.

"Then," Fred exclaimed, drawing a paper from his pocket and handing it to the little man, "you will please to read that, and see if you are acquainted with the signatures."

The stranger called for a candle, for it was nearly dark, and by its light began perusing the document.

"What is this?" he muttered; "a bill of sale of two horses, formerly owned by the police of Melbourne, to Messrs. Frank —— and James ——, signed by Hansen, the captain of police, and Murden, lieutenant. Can it be possible? Yes, it must be; I understand it all."

The little man threw himself upon us, grasped each of our hands, and to the intense astonishment of all present, began shaking them as though he was working a pump.

"How could I be so mistaken?" he asked. "I really thought; but, pshaw, my suspicions were so absurd."

"What's the row?" demanded big Ben, who began to feel the effects of the chemical whiskey.

"There is no row, only I am happy to say that I made a mistake in my man," the little person said.

"What, ain't they men, after all?" shouted Ben; "if they ain't men,

they must be wimmin, and that's all the better; if one of 'um wants a husbin' I'm the feller for her!"

"Their past conduct don't prove that they are women!" cried the little man. "They are the two Americans who are known all over the island as bushranger hunters. We have all read an account of their doings in the Melbourne papers, and we welcome them to the mines, and hope that they will be as successful here as they have been elsewhere."

"The devil they is; why, I thought when I seen that ere feller stand up to be shot at, that he had smelled gunpowder afore. Give us your hands, my chickens! Cuss me, if ye ain't an honor to the States!"

We hardly dared trust our hands within Ben's grip, yet when we did so, we were delightfully surprised to find that he was reasonable.

"Well, I allers said that they was all right!" cried Charley, who turned with the tide; "the instant I seed 'um insulted, I knew that I should be on the right side. You wouldn't like to pay for the whiskey which has been drunk, would you?" he asked, in an undertone.

Fred put a number of gold coins in his hand, but whether our sponging friend was overpaid, or whether the money fell short, I never knew, as I saw the little man give him a glance that was very expressive of his disapprobation, and with an ashamed look, the fellow slunk back to his whiskey cask.

"Come, gentlemen," said the little man; "this is no place for tired travellers. Let us retire, and leave the crowd to drink themselves drunk."

We followed his advice, and in a few minutes had left the dissipated miners to their revels.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Arrival at Ballarat. — Mr. Brown's Story.

We walked slowly along the main street of Ballarat, and chatted with our new friend on a variety of subjects. He appeared to be well informed on mining, and shrugged his shoulders when we intimated that our intention was to get rich by delving in the earth, and bringing its riches to light.

"By the way," our new acquaintance said, "it is a little singular that Murden did not give you a letter to me. He knows that I am stationed here, and that I would do all in my power to assist his friends."

I suddenly recollected, that just before we left Melbourne, Murden did scribble off a letter, and hand it to me, with a remark, that perhaps it might be useful to us. I had forgotten the circumstance, but I knew where the note was, and I determined to hunt it up as soon as I returned to my tent.

"I have a letter from the lieutenant," I said; "but if I am not mis-

taken, it is addressed to a Mr. Brown, although where Mr. Brown is to be found is more than I can tell."

The little man laughed in a quiet manner, as though he did not wish to commit himself by being too jovial.

"I think that you have hit upon the right one," he said, "for my name is Brown."

"Then you shall have the note," I replied; "but I should never have thought of looking for the one that it is addressed to."

"O, yes you would," he replied, confidently.

"Why do you think so?" I asked.

"Because you will hear my name mentioned oftener at Ballarat than any other."

"And pray, may we be so bold as to ask what your position is, that gives you so great a notoriety?"

"Ask? To be sure you may," returned the little man; "I am the police inspector of Ballarat, and my name is James Brown, very much at your service."

"We have mingled with the police so much since we have been in Australia, that we almost consider ourselves as belonging to the department. We are therefore sorry that we were not introduced to your notice under better auspices," Fred said.

"O, you alluded to that shooting affair to-night. That did not amount to much, although I must say that I wish you had killed the bully, for he has given me more trouble than any other man at the mines. He is as desperate a scoundrel as ever went unhanged, and had he been killed outright, there are few who would mourn his fate."

"That may be true, yet I have always a great repugnance to shedding human blood," replied Fred, in a sorrowful tone.

Mr. Inspector Brown stopped for a moment, as though surprised by the answer.

"I had the same kind of feeling once, yet it is many years since. A long residence in Australia has blunted all my finer sensibilities, and I have witnessed so much crime and cruelty, that I am unmoved now, even when a poor wretch is gasping forth his last words. I have often thought that I would give all the gold that the mines of Australia yield if I was but young again, and possessed the same sympathizing heart that I did once."

By this time we had reached our tent, and our approach was challenged by a deep bay from Rover, whom we had left to guard our baggage.

"A splendid animal," remarked the inspector, as he sought to lay his hand upon Rover's head; but the dog resented the liberty, and growled menacingly.

"He deserves all your praise," I replied, pleased at the conduct of the brute, and doubly pleased to hear a deserved tribute to his ability.

"If you ever feel disposed to part with him," the inspector hinted, "I will not haggle about his price."

"I will never sell him," I answered.

"Where did you obtain him, for I see that he is of English breed?" asked Inspector Brown.

We entered the tent, where we found Smith, who had preceded us

from the Californian's Retreat, and, after finding a seat for Mr. Brown, we related the manner in which Rover had started us by his deep bays, on the night of our first encampment by the hut of the old convict.

"And Black Darnley — when you met him, did the dog appear to recognize him as the author of the murder?" asked the inspector, who appeared deeply interested in our narrative.

I related the scene in the forest, when the bold outlaw yielded up his life to satisfy the vengeance of an enraged father; and when I had concluded, the little, dark man's eyes gleamed as though he had taken part in the battle.

"How I should liked to have been with you!" he exclaimed; "I can imagine your feelings, as you crept through the forest, and awoke the bushrangers with the crack of your rifles. No wonder the governor-general wished to secure your services in the police force."

"How did you learn that?" I asked, astonished at his knowledge.

"A friend at Melbourne wrote to me to that effect, and also sent me newspapers containing your exploits. The last brush that you had with Murden was more exciting than any other that you ever engaged in."

"How did you know that we had been so engaged?" asked Fred.

"By rumor. A team reached this place this evening, and the driver reports that he met Murden fifty miles from Melbourne, with eight or ten bushrangers as prisoners. From one of the police he gained his information that two Americans were participants in the fight. Of course I arrived at the conclusion that both of you were present. Come, tell me all about it."

"On condition that you relate one or two of your life adventures," Fred said.

"Agreed."

Fred commenced from the time when we began our search for gold, (although he wisely omitted all mention of finding any,) and recounted the surprise, and our capture — the rescue by Murden — the fight — the attempt of the bushrangers to burn us by firing the woods — an escape, and promise to Steel Spring, (at the mention of whose name Mr. Brown smiled, as though acquainted with the reputation of the treacherous wretch,) if he would guide us to the retreat of Nosey — the fulfilment of his promise, and the death of the bushranger chief, and the capture of his gang.

"A splendid, stirring time you had of it," said Mr. Brown, rubbing his sinewy hands as though he liked to work, and was impatient to think that he had not been there.

"But you," Fred said, "must have seen many rough times during your long service at the mines."

"My fights have been more with single men, or at least, not over three at a time. You were speaking of Black Darnley, and the manner in which he met his fate. I never encountered him but once, and then he slipped through my fingers; and whether the fellow concluded that we pressed him too hard, or thought that better opportunities for stealing existed near the forest, I can't say; but, at any rate, I never heard of his being nearer Ballarat than twenty-five miles after we met."

"If not too much trouble, please relate an account of it," I said.

The little man glanced at his watch, and saw that the hour was still

early, and after asking our permission to light his pipe, which we readily accorded, and joined him with pleasure in the same agreeable occupation, he began: —

"I think it was about three months since, when a party of three miners, who had accumulated a considerable amount of treasure by working in these mines, concluded that they would sell out their claim and return to Sydney, and from thence take ship to England, where they belonged. For the sake of saving the small percentage that government charges on sending gold dust to Melbourne, or Sydney, under the escort of soldiers, the miners concluded that they would guarantee its safety.

"I explained to them that they were running a great risk, as I had heard that Darnley was in the neighborhood; but they only laughed at my warnings, and pointed to their long knives and smooth-bored guns, and intimated that the bushranger must be a bold man who dared to ask them to stand and deliver.

"If I had not often heard such boasts, perhaps I might have been deceived; but I knew many men, both brave and daring, who had quailed at the sight of an armed bushranger, so I put no confidence in the stories of what they intended to do in case of an attack. I considered it my duty to warn them once more, and when that failed, I let them leave the mines without further remonstrance.

"I think that it was the third day after the miner's departure, that I was sitting in my office, making out a few records that were to be sent to Melbourne, when, to my surprise, one of the pig-headed fellows presented himself before me. I should hardly have known him, he was so changed. His feet were bare and bleeding, his clothes were torn into shreds, and his whole appearance of the most abject and wretched description.

"I asked a few questions, but for a long time my visitor could not answer me, so overcome was he with grief. He shed tears, upbraided himself for his obstinacy, and refused to be comforted. At length, by the aid of a few glasses of stimulants, I was enabled to learn his story. It was as I had half supposed.

"About twenty-five miles from Ballarat, a singular looking genius had joined them, and requested permission to travel in their company. He manifested so much fear of robbers, and told about his aristocratic relatives, and the large amount of money on his person, that a ready assent was given to his request."

"It must have been Steel Spring," I said.

The little man nodded his head in token of assent, and continued: —

"At noon, on the day that Steel Spring joined the party, a halt was proposed, under the shade of a gum tree that stood near the road. The miners, tired with the long walk, readily consented, and after partaking of their humble fare, Steel Spring produced a bottle, and invited all to join him in a friendly drink. He did not have to ask twice, and although no suspicions were entertained by the miners, the relater of the transaction told me that he noticed that Steel Spring's sups at the flask were short, and not at all frequent.

"The treacherous scamp, after he had won their confidence by relat-

ing some incidents connected with his early life, began to examine the guns which the miners carried; and after he had finished, and when the men were about ready to commence their journey, a stout, dark-faced, ferocious-looking man appeared before them. He soon made known his intentions, for in his belt he carried a pair of pistols, and at his shoulder, with glistening eyes glancing along the barrel, sighting the first one that offered to stir, was a heavy gun, with a bore like a blunderbuss.

"For a few seconds they stood thus, not a word being spoken, when suddenly Steel Spring, with a pretended cry of terror, threw himself at the feet of the stranger and shouted for mercy. It was a trick of his, and well he played his part; yet the miners did take up their guns, but found that the priming had been removed by Steel Spring while they were drinking his liquor.

"The instant the poor fellows made a motion towards repriming, the bushranger discharged his gun, and one fell. The other two, struck with awe at the sight of their comrade's blood, turned and fled — but a pistol shot brought down one of them, while, by good fortune, the third escaped, and brought to me a narrative of his sufferings.

"He had lost all of his hard earnings, for the gold dust was in their knapsacks, and left behind, a prize to Black Darnley. The survivor begged of me, nay, entreated, and promised half that he had lost if I would only recover his wealth. In fact, he appeared to be much more anxious to get his gold than avenge the death of his comrades; and amidst all his grief, he had the impudence to ask me if I did not consider that he was entitled to the wealth of his partners in case I recovered it. I was almost tempted to turn him out of my room, but I thought that it would do no good; I recollected that I had a public duty to perform, and I made preparations for an immediate departure. I took with me but three men, stout fellows whom I knew I could rely upon, and whose courage had been tested in a dozen fights.

"We armed ourselves with pistols and rifles, and mounting the fastest horses that we could command, started for the scene of robbery, in hope of tracking the villains to their retreat, and bringing them to speedy justice. We reached the tree, near where the murders had been committed, but no bodies were in sight. A short distance from the road, however, was a long line of dried weeds and rank grass, and as I observed a number of birds of prey sailing over the place, I concluded that I should find the remains of the men there. I was not disappointed.

"The bodies had been dragged out of sight of the road, and then rifled of every thing of value. I did not stop to give the poor fellows burial then, because every moment was of importance; but after we had concluded the expedition, my men returned and covered them with earth, and placed a rude cross at their heads.

"We examined attentively for a trail to show the direction that the robbers had taken, and luckily found it without difficulty. It led in a direct course towards Sydney, and it was evident that Darnley intended to cross the country for about fifty miles, and then strike for the common road, so that he could get provisions or water from those who happened to be passing.

"I studied on the matter for a few minutes, and wondered why they should choose such an extraordinary course; at last I came to the conclusion that the murderers were really bound for Sydney, and that they had an object in view, and were determined to get there as soon as possible — or why should they go over a mountainous country, when they might have kept the woods?

"The course which they had evidently taken was many miles shorter than the usual route, but a road that a horse could not travel.

"I suddenly recollected, while my men were following the trail for the purpose of seeing if my surmises were correct, that the miners had deposited in the Sydney bank about a thousand pounds, and that it was subject to their order. Their certificates of deposit must have been upon their persons when murdered, and Darnley would not scruple to boldly present himself at the bank, or else send Steel Spring to secure the money. I reasoned in that manner, and then concluded to act as though my surmises were facts.

"I recalled the men, and we started towards Sydney without a moment's delay. I knew that both robbers were fast travellers, but I calculated that I could reach the point at which they would strike the Sydney road as soon, if not sooner, than they did.

"In this I was disappointed; for although we rode all night, and only stopped long enough to recruit the strength of our animals, yet when I made an inquiry of a party bound for Ballarat, I found that two men, who stated that they were from the mines, had purchased provisions and water from them, and then continued on their course, as though they had not a moment to lose. It was noon when the information was given, and the murderers were seen at daylight. They had ten hours the start of us, but, nothing daunted, we pushed on, making inquiries of those whom we met, yet not a word of news could be obtained. I did not wonder much at that, for I knew that Darnley would avoid the high road as much as it was possible, and only strike it to obtain provisions. I also knew that he would conduct himself in a discreet manner, for fear of starting an alarm; and that he would forego all thoughts of pillage for the sake of carrying through the business which he had undertaken.

"Hoping to reach Sydney before him, I pressed on night and day, and only stopped long enough to recruit our animals when there was a prospect of their breaking down. On the forenoon of the fourth day after leaving Ballarat we entered Sydney, and rode direct to the bank. I inquired if the murdered men had money deposited there, and found that they had, and that no attempt to draw the same had been made. With a brief caution to the cashier not to pay out the amount, and to arrest any one who asked for it, I mounted my force on fresh horses and again sought the road on which I expected Darnley.

"I did not report myself to the police of Sydney, for I was determined to win all the honor, or sustain all the disgrace, of an encounter with Darnley. Perhaps afterwards I felt sorry that I had not obtained assistance, but I never acknowledged it to those in authority. I made an excuse that was considered sufficient for my course, and there the matter rested.

"About twelve o'clock on the day that we reached Sydney, we dis-

covered our men trudging along the road, disguised in a manner that at first almost deceived me, and I called myself well acquainted with the persons of Darnley and Steel Spring. I allowed them to get within a few feet of us, when I suddenly called upon them to stop. Up to this time it was evident that neither suspected us, but upon my speaking, I saw Darnley's hand thrust into his bosom, and I knew what he was searching for.

"'You are our prisoners,' I said, covering the person of Darnley with a pistol that I had never known to fail me.

"'You are mistaken in your men,' he answered, edging away from my horse.

"'It's no mistake,' I replied; 'I arrest you, Black Darnley, for the murder of two miners.'

"Still keeping my eyes upon the bushranger, and suffering my men to attend to Steel Spring, who cowed as though overwhelmed by despair, I disengaged one foot from the stirrup, and was just about dismounting, when I saw the villain draw a pistol and aim at me. He was so quick that I had no time to defend myself; but his rapid movement started the horse, and he shied just enough to save me and receive the contents of the pistol.

"The poor brute bounded and dashed against my companions, overturning two of them, and nearly unhorsing the other; and while I was picking myself up from the road, where I had been thrown, I heard a hoarse laugh, and saw Darnley and Steel Spring bounding over a fence that enclosed a number of acres of growing grain.

"Frantic with rage, I sighted them with my pistol, but the cap alone exploded; and before I could draw another, the murderers were out of sight. I looked towards my companions, to ask why they did not use their weapons, and I found that two of them were just picking themselves up from the middle of the road, and the third was going towards Sydney at a rapid rate, and in despite of his utmost exertions to stop the animal upon which he was mounted.

"I shouted to the men to follow me, but only one obeyed; the other had broken an arm in his fall, and was groaning over it piteously. We sprang over the fence and followed the trail through the grain, each step leading us away from the city and assistance, but I thought not of that. My whole desire was to grapple with the villains, and either capture them or end their career. I encouraged my companion to keep up with me in the pursuit; but I was either fleeter of foot, or else he sadly lagged behind, for after ten minutes' running I was left alone.

"I knew that it would be useless to return to the city and ask for assistance, and in fact, to tell the truth, I didn't want to be laughed at, as I knew that I should be after telling my story. So on I went, running with all my might after two men, either of whom was a match for me in a fair hand to hand fight.

"At length I caught sight of the murderers, and I redoubled my speed; and as I ran I placed fresh caps upon my pistols, and prayed that they would not disappoint me in my extremity. The villains saw me close at their heels, but they did not stop, supposing, of course, that I was backed by my men. Once or twice I saw Darnley look over his shoulder as though calculating the distance between us, so that I was

not much surprised when he stopped suddenly, and aimed his undischarged pistol at my head.

"That act stopped me in double quick time, for I had heard accounts of Darnley's proficiency with the pistol, and I thought I would exchange shots with him instead of coming to close quarters.

"I think that I owe my life to the speed with which Darnley had been running, and I am certain he escaped from the same cause, for when I raised my pistol I could hardly hold it in a straight line. We fired both at the same time. I felt something strike my side that appeared to burn like a coal of fire, and when I put my hand to the spot it was soon covered with blood.

"I staggered and fell; but even as I did so, I looked towards the bushranger to see if my shot had taken effect, I heard him exclaim, —

"'Hang him, he's hit me on the shoulder. I'll murder him for it!'

"'And get kotched by the beaks vile doing so!' rejoined Steel Spring, who appeared more anxious for flight than for blood.

"I remember seeing the ruffian start towards me, and then all was a blank until I awoke in the hospital at Sydney, where, by the way, I was obliged to stay for two weeks before I could get the physician's consent to let me return to Ballarat, and nearly three more passed before I was a well man."

"Did Darnley strike you after you fell?" asked Fred.

"He had no time, as I was afterwards informed. Just as he advanced towards me, the fellow I had outstripped appeared in sight, and the bushranger evidently thought that it was better to beat a retreat."

"And the gold, did you recover that?"

"Not a penny's worth, with the exception of that in the bank on deposit. I found out the relatives of the men murdered, and sent it to them, and very glad they were to get it."

"And the miner who escaped — where is he?"

"Here in Ballarat, a dissipated, shiftless wretch. The loss of his gold ruined him, for he has not had ambition enough to do a day's work since."

"Is the inspector here?" cried a man, thrusting his head into the tent just as Mr. Brown had concluded.

"Yes; what is wanting?" the little man asked.

"There's a big fight at the 'Pig and Whistle' saloon, sir, and it's pistols they is using, sure," replied the visitor.

"I wish they would enact the part of the Kilkenny cats," replied the inspector, as he rose to bid us good night, "for as sure as night comes a fight occurs at that den. Gentlemen, I shall see you in the morning, and if I can be of any service to you pray don't scruple to ask for it."

The inspector shook hands with us, and then turned to the fellow who had brought the news.

"Run to the Whistle and tell them I'm coming, and those not killed by the time I arrive shall be hanged without judge or jury."

"Yes, sir," replied the person addressed, and off he started to carry the message, while the inspector followed more slowly.

We saw that our animals were safe, and then left them in charge of Rover, while we retired to get a night's rest — something that we really stood in need of.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Finding of a 110 lb. Nugget. — Caving in of a Mine.

We had hardly dressed ourselves and made our scanty toilet the morning after our arrival, when the inspector made his appearance, looking none the worse for the tumult which summoned him away the night before.

"You are stirring early," he said, warming his hands by a fire which Smith had started for the purpose of getting breakfast; "I expected to find you sleeping off your fatigue, for men with nothing to do generally like to lie abed mornings."

"Late sleeping will not earn the fortune that we expect to get," replied Fred.

"So you still think of sinking a shaft here, do you?" inquired the inspector, with a grave smile.

"Of course, such is our intention at present, if we can get a license for mining."

"The license is obtained easily enough — government is very happy to receive ten shillings per month for the privilege of allowing a man to try his luck," the inspector answered, with an attempt at a laugh.

"Then if you will oblige us by getting a license, we will commence operations to-day," Fred answered.

"Why, you are in a hurry," Mr. Brown replied, seating himself composedly, and lighting a pipe which he carried in a small box in his pocket.

"Wouldn't you advise us to commence mining?" I asked.

"To answer you frankly, I would not, because I know that you can do better than by spending your days under ground, and emerge at night to find that you are killing both mind and body."

"Why do you speak of working under ground?" I inquired. "Is not mining the same here as in California?"

"Bless your heart"— and Mr. Inspector Brown smiled at my ignorance — "don't you know that at Ballarat a shaft has to be sunk many feet below the surface of the earth, and after you have reached the layer of dirt in which the gold is found, you are obliged to work upon your hands and knees, and excavate for many feet in different directions, until at last you break in upon some other miner's claim, and are compelled to retreat and sink a new shaft?"

This was all news to us, or if we had heard of it before we had not given the subject any attention. A new light broke in upon us, and we began to consider.

"Breakfast is all ready," said Smith, just at that moment.

We had brought a few luxuries with us from Melbourne that were unknown at the mines, and I saw the eyes of the inspector sparkle as he snuffed the perfume of the fried potatoes and warm chocolate.

"Will you join us, Mr. Brown?" I asked, extending an invitation that I knew he was dying to receive. "We have not much to ask you to share, but such as it is you are welcome to."

"Well," he answered, "really, I don't know as I feel like eating at so early an hour, but——"

Smith opened a hermetically sealed tin canister, which he had been warming in a pot of hot water, and the steam of fresh salmon greeted our olfactory nerves.

"What!" cried the inspector, with a look of astonishment, "you don't mean to say that you have got preserved salmon for breakfast?"

"If you will really honor us with your presence at breakfast you shall be convinced of the fact," Fred answered, politely.

"Say no more; I'd stop if all Ballarat was at loggerheads."

We were soon seated upon such articles as were handy, and after the first cravings of our appetites were satisfied, we renewed the subject of mining.

"All the miners," Fred remarked, "are not obliged to work so deep beneath the surface."

"If they do not, their chance of finding gold is exceedingly slim," replied the inspector. "I have known stout, lazy fellows pick around on the surface of the earth for weeks, and not earn enough to find themselves in food. To be successful a shaft has to be sunk."

"And yet, according to your own showing, gold is not always struck by such a method."

"True, and I can easily explain why it is so. Mining is like a lottery — where one draws a prize, hundreds lose. We might dig deep into the earth where we are seated, and it would surprise no one if we took out gold by the pound; and yet no one would think of laughing if we did not earn our salt. The case would be so common that no notice would be taken of it." We sat and listened to the inspector's words in silence, and began to think that we had better have remained in Melbourne and entered into business of a more substantial nature.

"I know of a dozen cases," the inspector continued, "where not even enough gold has been found by industrious men, who have sunk shafts, to make a ring for the finger; and yet not one rod from the place where such poor success was encountered others have grown rich, and left Ballarat well satisfied with their labor."

"But we have certainly read of men taking a nugget from these mines weighing over a hundred pounds," I said.

"And the account that you read was perfectly correct. I remember the circumstance well. It was soon after my recovery from the wound inflicted at the hands of Black Darnley. A man rushed into my tent one afternoon with his eyes apparently starting from their sockets, and his whole appearance that of a crazy man. He was breathless and speechless for a few minutes, but I at length obtained information that two miners had come across a nugget of gold so large that half a dozen men were unable to lift it from the shaft. I hurried to the spot, and as I went along hundreds of people were flocking to the scene. The news spread like fire upon a prairie. Saloons and rooms were deserted — miners crawled from their shafts — sick men forgot their ailments — even gamblers desisted from playing for a short time, in their anxiety to look at the largest lump of gold that had ever been discovered.

"When I reached the opening of the shaft I found many hundred people present, and fresh arrivals were joining the crowd every moment.

I organized a force, and drove the excited throng from the opening of the mine, for I feared that the chambers which had been excavated would not stand the pressure, and that those above and below would be buried alive.

"After I had succeeded in my efforts, we set to work and raised the mighty nugget to the surface, but instead of its weighing two or three hundred pounds, it weighed one hundred and ten. But it was a splendid lump of gold, almost entirely free from quartz and dirt, and of rare fineness and purity. The finders were overjoyed, as well they might be, and guarded their treasure with great care until they saw it safe in the custody of the government agent. A gentleman from Melbourne, who was on a visit to the mines for the purpose of collecting rare specimens of gold, offered the lucky finders four thousand pounds for the nugget, but they got an idea into their heads that it was worth more, and declined."

"And was that the largest nugget ever found?" I asked.

"As far as my knowledge is concerned. At the other mines I have heard that immense pieces have been found, but I consider the rumor as exaggerated."

"You would be greatly surprised if we should happen to discover a piece worth as much," I remarked.

"I think I should," answered the inspector, dryly, slowly filling his pipe, and apparently dilating on the subject mentally.

"Well, we will not pledge ourselves to make such a strike as the one you have related, but we will guarantee to get more gold than two thirds of the miners at Ballarat," Fred said, confidently.

The inspector shook his head.

"You don't know the kind of work that you will have to undertake," he said. "In the first place, you have got either to buy a claim, or begin digging at some spot where no one would think, unless a new arrival looking for gold. All the dirt that you wanted to work out would have to be carried to the water, and you can see that our lakes and rivers are not very extensive.

"We will imagine that you have resolved to commence operations, and that a suitable spot has been selected. After a day's digging, you will find, that to prevent the earth from caving in and burying you up, timber is wanting. You make application, and find that to buy staves and planks will cost you as much as a small house in the States. Even a few cracked branches are valued at the rate of five or ten shillings per stick, and you can calculate how much the cost would be after sinking a shaft a hundred or two hundred feet, to say nothing of the chamber work."

We began to comprehend that mining was rather difficult and uncertain work.

"Then, according to your showing, the best thing that we can do, is to pack up our traps and return to Melbourne," Fred said, after a long pause.

"By no means; you are not going to start so soon, I hope," the inspector replied.

"We see but little use of remaining here and wasting our means on an uncertainty," I answered.

"Have patience, my lads," replied the inspector, softly; "are there no other ways of making money besides mining?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, with a suspicious glance.

The inspector laughed, and slowly refilled his pipe.

"I don't propose to rob the specie train, or to waylay travellers. I think that money can be made in an honest manner, and without working very hard."

"But how? Show us the *modus operandi*."

"I will, with great pleasure. Make an agreement with your companion here, Smith, and let him return to Melbourne and load two teams with goods, such as I will give you a hint to buy. By the time he returns, you can have a store or large tent to receive them. Paint on a huge piece of canvas that you have fresh goods from England and the United States, and call your place the 'International Store.' It will sound well, and half of the fellows here won't know what it means, and of course they will patronize you for the purpose of finding out."

"But where is the capital to come from?" I asked, thinking that I would test his friendship by pretending that we had but little money at our command.

"A thousand pounds will be enough; I will recommend you to dealers in Melbourne who will be glad to give you three months' credit," the inspector answered, promptly.

"That may be true, but a thousand pounds is a large sum of money, and where are we to find it?" I asked.

"Why, I have five hundred pounds that I don't want to use, and I am so certain that what I recommend will succeed, that you are welcome to it without interest for a twelvemonth."

Mr. Brown seemed so sincere and honest that we were compelled to shake hands with him in token of our appreciation of his offer.

"We are comparatively strangers to you," Fred said. "How dare you to offer to trust us with money, when you don't know but we may deceive you?"

"Because I have met a number of Americans here at Ballarat, and I never knew one to do a dishonest action, no matter how hard he strove to make money. But what makes me feel positive in this case that I shan't lose my funds, is the honesty expressed in your faces."

"Pray spare our blushes, Mr. Brown," Fred said, laughing, "for we have not met with so much praise since we have been in Australia."

"Then you have been thrown in contact with rogues, who didn't give honest men their due. But speak; is my offer accepted?"

"We will consider on it, and let you know how we feel disposed, in the course of the day. But of one thing rest assured. We shall not call upon you for money, as we can manage to raise enough of our own to commence business."

Mr. Inspector Brown looked disappointed, and seemed to think that we had been playing with him.

"We only plead poverty to see if you would lend us your powerful assistance," Fred said. "If we should conclude to follow your advice, we will be sure and ask aid from you if we require it."

"Well, on such conditions I forgive the little trick you have played

upon me; and now I will explain more fully the idea that I entertain regarding my money-making scheme. You must set Smith at work, in company with another driver or freighter, and let them bring such articles as will find a ready market. A stock must be laid in, sufficient to last nearly all winter, for during the wet season the roads are next to impassable, and provisions go up like a rocket, only they forget to fall until good weather begins, and freighting gets brisk."

"But what articles are best for the market of Ballarat?" I inquired, beginning to grow interested in the inspector's scheme, in spite of myself.

"Smith can tell you as well as I, but I may as well answer the question while my tongue is loose. Flour is our great staple here, and is selling at a large profit on Melbourne prices. Let Smith, or some one that he may select, watch the potato market closely, and often great bargains may be picked up. Ship bread is also paying a big profit, while pork and rice can be made to cover all expense of freighting other articles. Pickles and vinegar, and even preserved meats, sell well, and, in fact, more money is gained by selling luxuries than dispensing more substantial articles. A large stock of tea, coffee, and liquids of all kinds, will enable you to open the most extensive store in Ballarat."

"That is so," echoed Smith, approvingly.

We were about to make further inquiries, when, breathless with haste, a miner rushed into our tent.

"In the name of God, Mr. Inspector, come and help me!" he gasped.

"Why, what is the matter, Bill?" Mr. Brown asked, quite coolly.

"It is matter enough. Our mine has caved in, and both Sam and Jack are buried alive. Help me get them out, and you shall have a share of the gold they have got on their persons."

"Did I not tell you, no longer ago than yesterday, that you was not shaping your shaft properly?" demanded the inspector, sharply.

"I know that you did, but we thought that we could save a few pounds, and run a little risk," replied the miner, in a humble tone.

"And a pretty mess you have made of it with your meanness. I have a great mind to let you do your own work, and save the lives of your comrades as best you can," and Mr. Brown looked cross.

"Don't say that, sir, when two poor human beings are probably dying. Hadn't you better help them first and scold them afterwards, if alive?" I inquired.

"Your advice is too good to go unheeded," returned Mr. Brown; "Bill, I will go with you at once, and do all in my power to assist you to rescue your comrades."

The miner led the way towards his claim at a brisk trot, and while we followed at his heels, Mr. Brown explained what we afterwards found often happened at Ballarat. Through neglect to buy staves, or heavy pieces of timber to keep the sides of the shaft from caving in, the poor fellows had been suddenly buried, and it was a question whether they could exist long enough to allow of a force to remove the earth which blocked up the entrance of the shaft.

When we reached the scene of the disaster not more than a dozen people were present, and they did not display any intense affliction at

the catastrophe. Five or six were smoking and lounging about, discussing the probabilities of the miners being alive, yet showing no great inclination to commence work and put all doubts to rest.

One miner — an aged man who had worked in the coal mines of Newcastle, England — expressed a decided opinion that both Sam and Jack were alive, and proceeded to demonstrate it by saying that the mine had been worked for some time, and it was probable that the men were at some distance from the shaft when the earth caved in; and when I asked how they could exist without air, he pointed out a large shaft that had fallen in such a manner that it prevented the dirt from filling up a large space, although it appeared to me as though hardly a ray of light could penetrate the crevice.

"If you think the men alive, why do you not commence working for their rescue?" I asked, indignantly.

"Hoot, man, who's to pay me for the time I'd be losing, while helping other folks. It's me own bread and butter I hiv to earn widout running after strange kinds of jobs," answered the old miner, a Scotchman; he was determined to be paid for his labor, and did not believe in charitable deeds unless one of his countrymen was concerned.

"Why, you don't mean to say that you require payment for helping dig out the men buried?" I demanded.

"Hoot, and why not, man? It's mickle a man gets here for his work, that he should be after throwing it awa."

"Is this a fair sample of the charity miners exhibit towards each other?" Fred asked of the inspector.

"I am sorry to say that it is; but this is not unusual; before you leave the mines you will see cases of selfishness that will make you think men have turned brutes, and possess the hearts of stoics," replied Mr. Brown, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I confess," Fred said, speaking so that those present could hear him, "that I have not lost all feelings of humanity, and that I never turned a deaf ear, or calculated what I should make by assisting a person in distress. The customs of Ballarat may be just, but I must say, that in my humble opinion, they are heartless and cruel."

"Hoot, man," replied the Scotchman; "you are but a boy, and have not been long enough here to understand us. It's little silver or gold ye will git if ye run after other people's business."

The Scotchman relighted his pipe, and was walking towards his tent, when Fred stopped him.

"What shall I pay you per hour for assisting to rescue the miners?" he asked.

"Ah, now man, ye is talking to some purpose, now. What will ye give?"

"Two shillings per hour," answered Fred, at a venture.

"Ah, well, I don't mind helping the poor fellows, at that rate. I never could stand distress. But, Misther, ye wouldn't mind paying in advance, I suppose?"

"I will be responsible for your pay," the inspector said, seeing that the man hesitated from fear that he should get cheated, after he had performed his part of the bargain.

The fellow, luckily, had an axe with him, so, without more delay, we

lowered him into the shaft, and set him at work shoring up the sides, so that others could work without danger of the earth caving in.

We had just got him employed, when Bill, the man who had first appealed to the inspector for help, again joined us, having been absent in search of friends to lend assistance.

"I can't get a man to aid me," he cried, "unless I promise to pay them for their labor."

"Well, then, you must pay them," briefly rejoined the inspector, who, with coat off, was hard at work cutting timber in proper lengths for shores and supports.

"And ruin myself by so doing," the heartless wretch exclaimed, in a sulky manner, and with the expression of a fiend.

The inspector made no reply, but continued his labor, and without delay we joined him.

"I don't suppose these young fellers would be willin' to allow me two shillin's per hour for workin', would they?" the impudent scamp asked, appealing to the inspector.

"Hark ye, Bill," Mr. Brown said; "if you are not stripped and in that shaft in less than five minutes, I'll not only drive you from the mines, but I'll levy on your property to pay all the expenses of this job. I know where you keep your dust, and can lay my hand on it at any time."

The brute, without a moment's delay, removed his heavy guernsey frock which he wore, and was lowered to a place beside the Scotchman.

By the time we had got fairly at work, we were joined by Smith, who had remained behind to attend to the wants of his cattle, and the honest fellow, without a moment's delay, lent us his powerful aid.

The novelty of seeing three strangers at work endeavoring to save the lives of unfortunate miners, began to attract attention, and we soon found that a large crowd was assembling.

Fred, in his eager and impetuous manner, appealed for volunteers; and he painted the duty that man owes to man in such fine colors, that a dozen or twenty burly fellows presented themselves, and demanded a chance to assist in the benevolent work.

It was a great triumph for us, and so Mr. Brown informed us, for he declared that he had never known the people of Ballarat so liberal before. Just as the old Scotchman was about to leave the shaft for dinner, he requested silence, as he thought he heard the voices of the imprisoned men.

We all listened, and found that he was not mistaken, and the knowledge that the men were alive was a sufficient incentive to urge us all to renewed exertion.

Men forgot their dinners, and worked as though their own lives depended upon their labors, and without stopping to rest or eat, we continued on until four o'clock, when we raised the poor fellows to the surface of the earth, and found, with joy, that they were as well as could be expected, after so long an imprisonment

Shouts rent the air, and hundreds of miners rushed towards the shaft to congratulate the rescued men, and amid all the confusion, Fred, Smith, and myself walked off quietly, and sought that rest at our tent which we so much needed.

We were just engaged drinking a pot of coffee, when, to our surprise, all three of the miners, Bill, Sam, and Jack, entered our tent, without ceremony.

"We are not very rich," Sam said, wiping his heated brow, and remaining uncovered while he addressed us, "but we can't let three strangers, who have worked so hard for our deliverance, go unthanked. Bill, here, has told us all about it, and how the d——d Scotchman refused to work unless paid. Don't let the latter affair trouble you, 'cos we've settled with him, and now we want to fix things with you."

"We are already settled with," I answered; "it's pleasure enough to us to know that you are both safe, and for that object we would work as hard again."

"Would you, though?" demanded the speaker, a look of delight overspreading his face. "Well, if I ever see my children or wife again, they shall learn to pray for you, and I would, if I knew how."

"When the shaft caved in," Jack said, "we had just found three nuggets of gold, and even during our extremity, we retained our hold of them. We are not rich, as Sam states, but if you will accept of the nuggets, and keep them as a remembrance of our deliverance, we shall feel thankful."

They laid them down and were gone before we could remonstrate, and just as they left the tent the inspector entered.

"Well," he exclaimed, "what have you decided to do about the store? The patronage of the whole of Ballarat is at your disposal, for, go where I will, I can hear of nothing but the two Americans, who fight duels with one hand and rescue people with the other."

"We have decided," replied Fred.

"That you will commence business?" eagerly inquired the inspector.

"Yes."

"Good!" and without another word the inspector left our tent abruptly, as though he had forgotten some important business.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Incidents in Life at Ballarat.

We had hardly recovered from the surprise of the inspector's mysterious disappearance, when our old acquaintances, Charley, the proprietor of the "Californian's Retreat," and "Big Ben," made their appearance, and seated themselves upon boxes in our tent without the formality of being asked. Ben was smoking away desperately at a short pipe, nearly as black as his beard, while Charley, as became the owner of an established business, confined his attention to a cigar which are vulgarly called, in this country, "short sixes," I believe.

"I s'pose you haint forgot old friends nor nothing?" Charley said, as he carefully laid aside his cigar, to be resumed some other time, while he accepted a pot of coffee at the hands of Smith.

"We have thought of you often since we parted," replied Fred, with a slight flight of imagination.

"Do tell if you have? Well, I declare to man, if you two fellers don't beat all natur, and no mistake. You don't 'pear to make any thing of fighting duels, and then hiring folks to dig other folks out of a mine. I tell Ben, here, ef I had known you had the dust to spare I should have axed you to discount a note for me for sixty days, payable at sight, with interest. You wouldn't want to do any such thing as that, I s'pose? No, I reckoned not."

For the first time we really noticed our countryman's peculiar dialect and manners, and it gave us more pleasure to see a genuine Yankee at the mines of Ballarat than it would had we found a nugget weighing a pound.

"We have but little money, and from appearances I think we shall need all we have brought with us," replied Fred.

"You'd better believe you will," said Ben, with an ominous shake of the head, as though he had passed through the furnace of experience.

"What we came here to see you fellers for," Charley said, after a slight pause, and an exchange wink with Ben, "is to know how you stand in regard to this 'ere mining tax, which is crushing the life blood out of the vitals of us honest working men, and making us think of Bunker Hill and the American Eagle, I can tell you?"

"Really," Fred answered, after a moment's thought, "I am too fresh an arrival at the mines to give an opinion as yet, and I think we shall have to wait and see how grievous the tax is."

"Ain't that what I told you?" grunted Ben, appealing to Charley.

"You just wait a while, will ye, old feller," remonstrated Charley. "Things is working, I tell ye."

"We shall be happy to listen to you — go on," was all the response Fred returned.

"I s'pose you have all read 'bout the tea tax, a good many years ago, when our revolushinary daddies pitched the darned stuff overboard in Bosting harbor?"

Fred nodded in token of acquiescence.

"Wall, things here is something like the things in them 'ere times, only a darned sight wus. Now, the miners are taxed a putty considerable sum jist for the chance of digging about on this earth, when by nat'ral rights the fellers hadn't orter pay a cent.

"Sometimes the miner is lucky, and then agin he isn't; but whether he gets a pile or not, he's got to shell over every month, and if he don't come down he gets no license, and can't arn an honest livin'. Now what do you think of such a state of things, hey?"

"Perhaps that the government don't know that you feel that the tax is a burden," Fred answered, evasively.

"O, yes, they do, 'cos we've petitioned a dozen times to have 'em abolish it, but no notice has been taken of our papers. They can't say that the thing was not correct, 'cos I writ one of 'em and headed it with my name, to let 'em know that we Americans still possessed the spirit of our granddaddies."

"Then you had better petition again," remarked Fred, determined to take no part in his schemes at present.

"No, we are tired of that 'ere game, 'cos two can't play at it. What we have got to do is, to say to the Britishers, here, we won't give you another shillin' to save your old crown, and then we shall bring 'em round."

"But what say the Englishmen at Ballarat? Do they refuse or grumble at paying a tax?"

"Of course they do! There isn't an Englisher or a foreigner but is ready to say we won't stand the imposition no longer — things is coming to a head, and no mistake."

"And what do you wish us to do?" inquired Fred.

"We want you to jine us, and help stir the boys up so that they'll listen to reason, and stand out like men," replied Charley, and Big Ben grunted his applause at the sentiment.

"But that we are not willing to do at present. We are strangers here, and have paid no tax, nor have we been asked to. We shall not go into the matter blindfolded; therefore, for the present, we must keep aloof from your gatherings and petitions."

Charley sat and listened without interruption.

"Do you know what Australia is?" he asked, in a whisper, dropping his voice as though fearful of being overheard.

Fred replied that he considered it the largest island in the world, and that, if the truth was known, it would not be so well populated as at present.

"That's it," replied Charley, "the largest island in the world. Bigger than all the New England States, and much more valible. Do you understand me?" and the fellow winked violently.

"I can't say that I fully comprehend you. Can't you be a little more explicit?" Fred asked.

"Sartainly. This 'ere island is rich — more gold is exported than from California — immense droves of sheep is scattered all over it, and all kinds of garden stuff will grow in abundance, if only planted. You understand me now, don't you?"

"I am still in the dark," replied Fred, trying hard to refrain from a smile at the mention of "garden stuff."

The two visitors again exchanged glances, when Charley sank his voice still lower.

"What do you think of annexation, hey?"

"What, annex Australia to the United States?" we exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Hush! Don't blart it out in that way, 'cos the thing is a secret as yet. We have got to work to bring the thing 'bout, but it can be done."

"And, pray, in what manner?" we asked, somewhat amused to find that even Australia was not safe from the Yankee's covetousness.

"In this 'ere manner. The Britishers feel riled at the idea of paying taxes on mining, and when we tell 'em that in California every body can dig as long as they darn please, without paying a dime, they feel madder than ever. Of course, we don't cheek that 'ere feeling at all. O, no; we stirs 'em up, and preaches how great a blessing it is to belong to a free and enlightened government like the United States of America."

"Well, go on and explain the whole method."

"I'm coming on as fast as I can. By and by the fellers round here say that we won't pay any more tax, and then the government says you shall, and tell the sogers to collect it; and while they is doing that, some miner resists and is killed, and then we have something to work upon, and we begin to stir people up by telling 'em how badly we've been treated; and then a soger gets knocked on the head by some lucky accident, and we have a fight with the red coats, and lick 'em, and then war is declared between us, and at it we go for a few months, till we have driven every red coat out of the country, and then declare that it is a republic, and that we'll do as we please."

"Why, this is treason," we exclaimed, amazed at his audacity.

"I know that old Ben Franklin, Geo. Washington, and others were called traitors for talking in the same way during the revolution, but their cause was just and triumphed at last," replied Charley, dogmatically.

"But you don't compare your sufferings and oppression to that which our revolutionary fathers bore, do you?"

"I don't know 'bout that. We is taxed, and so were the old fellers that we read about who fought and died for our benefit, and I think we ain't worthy of the name of Yankees unless we resist all taxes!"

"But suppose that the English government should feel inclined to yield and vacate the island, leaving the people of Australia to make laws for themselves, what course should you pursue?"

"Do?" replied our ardent friend, without a moment's hesitation, "appoint the proper officers, elect a president, and have a senate and house of representatives, jist as they do at Washington."

"And what then?" we inquired.

"Why, after we had got to going we'd send a feller, and I know one who would do first rate, to the United States, and after playing our keerds putty well, we'd agree to annex Australia to the United States, and we'd do it, too, by thunder."

We could hardly retain our countenances long enough to listen to the splendid burst of expectation which Charley had dreamed upon so long,

that he really fancied his project was practicable. Conquest first, and annexation afterwards, is the theme upon which Americans harp when in strange lands.

"You don't know the feller that I have in my mind's eye!" Charley said, after a few minutes' silence.

"No, I am not acquainted with any of my countrymen here at Ballarat," Fred replied, with a vacant look.

"The fellow that I know hain't bin here in Ballarat a great while."

"Indeed."

"Yes; and though I don't know your name, I reckon you'd do the trick putty neat."

"O," answered Fred, with a smile, "it's me that is to be honored with so delicate a mission, is it? To what am I indebted for the selection?"

"Wall, we want your help to stir the folks up, and no mistake. Me and Ben have been and talked the matter over, and we've agreed to let you have that 'ere office, if you will back us up; Ben is to do a good part of the fighting, and I'm to negotiate."

"We will take your proposition into consideration. But there is one thing that you have forgotten. What offices are my two friends here to get?"

"O, we'll make 'em senators, or somethin' of that sort. They shall be cared for in some way or other."

I could only bow my thanks to the kind gentleman, but before I could reply, the inspector joined us.

"Ah, Ben, you and Charley here," he said, in a careless way. "How does the indignation meetings and the petitions get along?"

"Wall, we have another meetin' to-night, and I think that it will be a rouser. We shall make ourselves heard yet, Mr. Brown."

"I have no doubt that you will, but it will be in a different manner from what you anticipate. Let me advise moderation, or there may be trouble."

"There kin be a muss if we is disregarded, and made to pay for what we don't have," answered Ben, sullenly; and with that shot the Americans left the tent.

"Of all the unreasonable brutes that I ever encountered, the miners of Ballarat appear to be the worst," ejaculated Mr. Brown. "That fellow, Charley, has not worked ten weeks in the mines, and yet he talks as glibly of the evils of taxation as though the government was wringing the last shilling from his possession. He is a pot house wrangler, as we call them in England, and is a positive nuisance at Ballarat."

Mr. Brown appeared to be disgusted with our countryman, for he displayed more temper than we had seen since we had made his acquaintance.

"But the miners have some reason for complaint," I said. "Taxation without representation is wrong, and has occasioned much ill feeling and bloodshed."

"True; but without the present tax, how can government support a police force, and send gold to the cities under the escort of soldiers? How can the hospitals at Sydney and Melbourne, always filled with disabled miners, be kept open, and how can the roads be kept clear of

bushrangers? The tax is not unreasonable per month, and yet through its collection see how much government is enabled to do? All goes to the benefit of the miner, and every pound is expended for his protection or comfort. As far as representation in our House of Assembly is concerned, I'm certainly in favor of it; but just show me how we are to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion regarding the number of members Ballarat is entitled to. I've been here ever since the mines were discovered, and I can't tell. To-day there may be fifteen thousand, and to-morrow not ten. People are coming and going continually. They change from mine to mine at every rumor, and I assure you that change is not beneficial to their financial affairs."

"In that case we shall have to do a cash business when we open our store," Fred said, with a smile.

"Of course. It will never do to give credit to strangers. But while speaking of stores, let me inform you that I have made a few arrangements in your behalf. I have secured a fine location for you, and spoken to a man who is desirous of selling a suitable building."

"And the price?" we asked.

"Is reasonable beyond all my expectations. The owner is homesick, and will not haggle about a few pounds."

"Why cannot we look at the store this afternoon, and decide whether we will take it or not? It will save time."

"Come, then; I have no objections."

We followed the inspector through the most thickly-settled part of the town, and at length stopped before a good-sized frame building, with the roof and sides covered with sail cloth and common cotton. The man who called himself the proprietor, was an Englishman, suffering under a severe attack of rheumatism, and therefore inclined to exclaim loudly against the mines, and Ballarat in particular. The few articles which he had in his store were old and unworthy of purchase.

We examined the premises, and found, according to our California experience, that we could take up our quarters there, and with a little trouble, make the building water proof. There was room also for an addition to be made in case it was necessary, and as the place was easy of access, we concluded we could do no better than strike a bargain, and secure the building as soon as possible. This we were the better able to do through a few suggestions which Smith let fall concerning the severity of a wet season, and the danger of rheumatic people remaining at the mines during its continuance.

For a hundred pounds in cash, we were put in complete possession of not only the store, but all it contained, including a very good stove, of a Massachusetts man's make, and sent to Australia on speculation — three or four pots and kettles — a number of cracked dishes, very dirty — weights and scales, both large and small, and which, we afterwards found, were so arranged that the buyer got about two-thirds of what he paid for, while the weights for purchasing gold dust were a little too heavy to accord with strict honesty — barrels containing remnants of articles of not much use to any one, besides other things which we did not make any account of.

We made a bargain that we should take possession of the premises on the next day, and after taking a bill of sale of the articles purchased,

with the bold signature of Mr. Brown as a witness of the transaction, we returned to our tent, and thought that our labors for the day were over. In this, we were unhappily disappointed, for, to our extreme amusement, a dozen or twenty persons were seated in the vicinity of our temporary home, and a more wretched, woe-begone set I never saw in my life.

"Hullo! what is the meaning of this?" I asked in surprise, as I surveyed the crowd.

"We've come to be doctored by you," said an Irishman, exposing his hand, wrapped in a dirty bandage.

"But there is some mistake here. You have applied to the wrong man," I replied.

"No mistake, yer honor," answered a sturdy, good-looking, bronzed fellow, with a military air and a military salute; "we've heard of yer honors, and we know that ye can do us good without wringing the last shilling from us, like those blood-sucking sawbones."

"They take us for physicians," muttered Fred, in astonishment.

"You are mistaken," replied Mr. Brown; "they are poor devils, who cannot afford to employ a surgeon, so come to you to get their wounds dressed. If you have any knowledge of cuts and bruises, assist them, and you will be no loser by it."

The advice was good, but the idea of our prescribing and dressing all the wounds of the poor of Ballarat was something that we had not bargained for.

"You see, your honor, I got an ugly cut on my hand with a shovel, a few days since, and, somehow, I don't think that it's doing very well," the military man said, exposing his right hand, which looked in a horrible condition.

"You should ask the advice of a physician," I said, after a brief inspection of the poor fellow's injury; "inflammation has set in, and you will have trouble, unless the cut is attended to."

"I know that, yer honor; but it's little the doctors around here care for me, unless I visit 'em with a gold piece in my hand. I've paid six pound already, and I think I'm getting worse very fast."

I could not help pitying the poor fellow, he was such a sample of manly strength, and bore himself like a true soldier. He had been discharged from the British army, at the expiration of his time, and was in hopes of making money enough to go home and live in peace with his parents.

All this I learned after a few minutes' conversation; and when I saw that he regarded us as superior in medical intelligence to the few practising surgeons at Ballarat, and all on account of our being Americans, I could not find it in my heart to turn away from him. He had touched the right spot in our national character, and perhaps we felt a little vain, and a desire that his expectations should be fulfilled.

"Your honor is going to do something for us?" the soldier said, and he read the expression of my face correctly.

With none too much confidence in my own skill, I determined to undertake his cure, and at work Fred and myself went, I taking the soldier and he the Irishman.

For the information of those who may be disposed to question my

skill, I will state that I first washed the wound in tepid water, using castile soap to cleanse the parts, and that after a patient process, I covered the cut with salve, such as we had brought from Boston, and then bound it up with clean bandages, and gave him strict orders not to remove the cloths, or to use his hand in working. Other directions, concerning diet, I administered, and made my patient promise to keep them, and after I had concluded, I was obliged to attend another, and out of charity, Fred and myself were kept working until near sundown.

"That is the best day's work that you ever performed," the inspector said, as the last patient took his departure, profuse in his thanks. "Before this time to-morrow, the skill of the American doctors, as they will insist upon calling you, will be so magnified, that there is no disease that they will not insist you can cure. Two branches of business are now offered you — that of a professional gentleman, and the more plebeian one of a storekeeper."

"The latter, by all means," replied Fred, with a laugh at the idea of our having M. D. added to our names.

"Don't make sport over that which may yield a large income," the inspector said, seriously; "I have seen injuries dressed in a worse manner than those this afternoon."

"Perhaps," I rejoined, thinking that he was disposed to make game of us.

"I am honest in my expression, and to prove it so, how many regular surgeons or physicians do you think there are at Ballarat?"

"Ten," I answered, at a venture.

"One is the actual count; the balance are quacks, or else apothecaries' apprentices, escaped from indentures, who find a rich field in humbugging the unwary."

"Well, let them operate," returned Fred; "we will not enter into competition with them at present. But come in and eat supper with us, for we have many things to talk about."

"I accept the invitation with more pleasure than you are aware of, because the exquisite flavor of the pickled salmon that I ate for breakfast is still lingering in my mouth, and I long for another taste."

We humored our friend by complying with his hint, and after we had finished our tea, we lighted our pipes, talked business, and broached a subject to Smith, which we had entertained ever since we had decided to go into business.

Our proposition to Smith was, that he should form one of a partnership, to be conducted under the firm of Frank, Jack, & Smith. The latter was to attend to the freighting and buying in Melbourne, while we would do the trading and selling at Ballarat. We agreed to put in three thousand dollars each, and we were to value Smith's team and animals, and allow a fair price for them, and then he was to make up with cash enough to bring his capital equal to ours.

There were many things which we had to say that we did not like to discuss before the inspector, so that when he arose to go, we felt thankful. We then drew up articles of partnership, and gave Smith an order to get the gold which we had stored at the old stockman's, and to take a certain portion of it to buy goods, and deposit the remainder to our order in the Melbourne Bank.

After our business was completed, the night was far advanced; and with bright anticipations for the future, we retired to our hard beds, and dreamed of home and happiness.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Attempt of the Housebreaker. — Attack by the Snake.

I confess that it is somewhat startling to awaken a few minutes before sunrise, and see a dozen rough, gaunt, ragged men, standing near the entrance of one's tent, and to hear them whisper in a low tone, as though they intended murder, or robbery at least; and it was with the latter impression that I sprung from my couch, revolver in hand.

"What is the meaning of all this?" I asked, rubbing my eyes, not being thoroughly awakened.

"Ah, yer honor is awaken, is ye?" inquired a familiar voice; and upon closer inspection, I found that our Irish friend, whose hand Fred had dressed the succeeding evening, was one of our visitors.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" I asked, hastily concealing my revolver. "What has sent you here so early?"

"Faith, it's yer honor that may well ax that. It's a beautiful night's rest I had, yer honor, and I couldn't rest without coming and telling yer honor of it. It's painless is my hand, and it's all owing to the doctoring, I know, glory to God; and it's a few friends of mine I've brought wid me, whom I hope yer honors will look at for my sake, and long life to yer honors' ginerosity."

"Well, this is cool, certainly," I said, in a low whisper to Fred. "What are we to do? We can't afford to devote all our nights and mornings to practising on the philanthropic style."

"We must make the best of our bargain, at present. If we should turn them away, people would say that we possessed no feeling, and as likely as not we should get insulted in some manner or other during the first drunken fray that occurred near our new place of business. As we have begun, so must we finish."

I concluded that Fred's advice was far the best, and without another complaint, I assisted him to go through with our new patients. As usual, they left, profuse in their thanks, but no substantial token of their appreciation was deposited with us.

There was one thing that we found we were running short of, and that was salve; and we saw, perhaps with some tokens of satisfaction, that when that was ended, our career of doctoring would also terminate.

After breakfast, Smith yoked up his team, and moved our tent and worldly goods to the new house which we had purchased the day before. The man from whom we had bought it was all packed up and ready to start for Melbourne that very day, and when he found that Smith was going on the same journey, he engaged a passage, and expressed,

in heartfelt thanks, his joy at the prospect of his soon leaving Ballarat forever.

"I 'ope," he said, in cockney dialect, "that I never shall be obliged to earn my living in a country vare the spiders are as big as a 'at, and as savage as a bull dog — vare snakes crawl into bed vith yer, and drive yer out — and vare the inhabitants had rather tell a lie than the truth. I'm going 'ome to Hingland, and those vot vant gold may come 'ere and dig it if they please, for all I care."

Our parting with the honest fellow who had been our companion for so many days, and who had shared with us so many adventures, was of a sorrowful nature, and it seemed as though all that we held dear on the island was lost to us. Even Smith tried hard to conceal his grief, and I saw moisture in his eyes as he turned towards his cattle, after receiving our instructions for the last time, and started on his long journey.

The team was just disappearing from view, when his passenger, who, owing to his rheumatism and a light freight, was allowed to ride, struggled to his feet, and gave us a parting salutation.

"Look out for the snakes," he yelled; "they is apt to enter the 'ouse during the night and if you value your dog you'd better tie him on to the roof, or he'll be swal——"

The balance of the wretch's remark was lost in the distance, but we knew its meaning, and almost wished the same might befall the late proprietor of the building, before he reached Melbourne.

Our feelings were not very lively during the day, yet we went to work and made many improvements in our future home, and even got hold of a few boards, — remnants of boxes, — which we nailed on the roof; and by purchase and favor, were enabled to complete it in the course of a week, so that by spreading tarred sail cloth upon the boards, we flattered ourselves that we should be comparatively protected from the heavy rain storms which comprise the winter months.

We cleaned out our store, and arranged the few articles which we owned, and got ready for commencing business when Smith returned. Then we began painting a huge sign on strong sail cloth, and acting on the inspector's suggestion, called our place the "International Store."

By night time we were thoroughly tired, and were ready to thank fortune that our usual number of patients was not present to demand our *professional* aid. The inspector dropped in to see us for a short time, after supper; but he did not stop long, as a large meeting of the miners was to take place that night, and he expected quite a stir would be made in regard to the mining tax. We were therefore left alone to pass the night, and after an inspection of the horses, and finding that they were doing well, we "turned in," as the sailors say, and slept soundly for three or four hours, when I was awakened by a low growl from Rover, who was lying at my feet.

I started at the sound, and listened, but could discover no cause for alarm. Still, I saw that the hound was restless, and through the darkness observed that his eyes burned like coals of fire, and that he appeared to be watching for further signs of danger.

Thinking that the noise of some brawler had disturbed him, I again lay down; but as I did so the dog uttered another low growl, and crept near my face, as though fearful of something that was invisible to

my eyes. I patted his neck, and to my surprise I found he was trembling as I had never known him before. He crouched close to me, and seemed almost inclined to desert me; but I soon calmed him, although, for the life of me, I could not understand why he should appear so frightened.

For a few minutes I sat upright and listened attentively, but not a sound rewarded me for my patience. I heard Fred breathing heavily a few feet from me, but I disliked to awaken him, as I knew that he was very tired when he went to sleep, and as yet I had seen nothing that warranted me in disturbing him. I was just about to speak to the dog in an angry tone, when he suddenly uttered a sharp yelp, and I heard a slight rustling within a few feet of me.

It was a peculiar sound, and startled me. It was not like the heavy or light tread of man, but it seemed as though some substance was being drawn across the floor at a cautious rate. Again it stopped, and all was still; I held the dog firmly by the collar, but he trembled so violently that I began to partake of his fear, and no longer delayed in awakening Fred.

I reached over, and placed my hand upon my comrade's face, and the touch awoke him instantly.

"Hist!" I whispered; "don't speak above your breath for your life. There is some person in the room!"

I could feel my friend place his hand upon his trusty revolver, and I knew that he was prepared for action. I shifted my position so that I could get beside him, and then, armed in a similar manner, I awaited further developments.

"What has disturbed you?" he asked, in a whisper that would have been inarticulate two paces from us.

"I can't imagine. Even Rover has taken fright, and for the first time; see how he trembles," I responded.

"Get your matches all ready, and when we wish a light we will have one without delay. Hark! What was that?"

We both listened attentively. Not ten feet from us, we could hear a movement that now sounded as though a man was crawling upon his stomach. Carefully he appeared to work his way along, stopping every few seconds, as though uncertain whether to advance or recede; and it seemed as though we could hear our night visitor breathe during his pauses.

We did not wish to use our pistols, for we did not know but that the former proprietor of the store was in the habit of giving lodgings to miners, who were not acquainted with the change of ownership; but we made up our minds that we would guard against such interruption of our slumbers in future.

"We had better ask what he wants," whispered Fred, "and then we will light a candle and examine him."

"Go ahead; your lungs are the strongest," I answered, in an audible tone.

At the sound of my voice, the slow, slimy movement upon the floor ceased, and the visitor appeared to be listening.

"Who goes there?" demanded Fred, with a voice slightly tremulous.

It appeared to me that I could hear a slight breathing near, but I was

not sure. The slow moving or creeping across the floor had ceased; we listened for a repetition of it.

"Are you a friend or foe?" Fred asked.

There was no response for a moment, and then the slow, cautious movement began again.

"Strike a light," whispered Fred, "and let us see what this means."

Among the effects which we had found in the store was a large lamp for burning alcohol; this Fred had cleansed and trimmed the day before, and filled with spirits of turpentine, for the purpose of using it in cooking. I knew where it was placed; so I crept carefully along on my hands and knees, and suddenly lighted it with a lucifer. As the huge wick took fire, I hastily glanced over my shoulder, for fear that an assassin should strike a blow before I could be on my guard.

A startling yell from Fred caused me to spring to my feet, and as I did so, a long, dark object flashed before my eyes, and narrowly missed my head. The next instant my yell of terror was added to Fred's, for in the middle of the floor, with waving tail, and eyes that blazed like coals of fire, was a monstrous snake of a jet black hue; the huge mouth of the reptile was thrown open to its widest extent, and was armed with fangs an inch in length!

For a short time after my cry of terror, I remained silent, not daring to move, for fear that the reptile, who appeared to be debating which of us to attack first, should make a spring, and encircle me in his dreadful folds, and crush out my life before I could utter a prayer.

Even to this day I can remember how I trembled, and how weak my knee joints appeared to grow; and even now, I fancy I can see the slimy, gleaming monster examine first me, and then the flickering flame of the lamp, as though only astonishment at the illumination kept him at a distance.

I did not for a moment lose sight of that powerful, waving tail, or the glowing eyes, although I thought I would give all the world to be miles from the spot.

I had heard of the monstrous size that black snakes acquired in Australia, but I had regarded the stories as travellers' yarns, and only got up to intimidate new comers. Now that I was satisfied of the truth of the accounts, I could have wished that an earthquake would swallow the reptile, so that it but left me secure.

I glanced hastily towards Fred. He was seated on his bed, as startled and surprised as myself, but I thought that I saw his hand move slowly towards his revolver, and I prayed that his eyes would not deceive him when he fired.

Rover had disappeared, but I could hear his loud bay outside of the building, and I hoped that it would attract attention, and that assistance would reach us before it was too late.

Still that fearful and muscular tail waved and played in the air, as though undecided where to strike.

For a moment I removed my eyes from the bright orbs before me, and to my surprise, I saw a quantity of old canvas, stowed in a corner where we had left it the day before, begin to move. The snake was apparently attracted by the same object, and moved its body slightly to get a better view.

I thought, with horror, that perhaps it was the mate of the reptile, and that Fred and myself would furnish a meal for each. Still, I watched the canvas and the movements of the snake closely. The former was gradually and carefully unrolled, and then, to my surprise, I saw the head of a man thrust cautiously out, as though to discover the cause of the recent noise, and why a lamp was burning at that hour of the night.

The snake saw the man's head as quick as myself — at least, I judged that it did by its motions; for the huge mouth expanded wider than before, and a long, forked tongue darted back and forth, as though longing for something to gorge. The tail of the reptile also waved more gently, as though uncertain where to strike.

To my surprise, the man who was concealed in the canvas appeared to pay no attention to our hideous visitor, for he pushed aside the cloth that covered him, and seemed desirous of either investigating the contents of our money-pouches, or else making his escape from the building.

He was an ugly-looking fellow, as seen by the flickering of our lamp, and had I been unarmed, I should have cared but little about meeting him in the dark; under the present circumstances I almost welcomed him as a friend, and would willingly have given him a few hundred pounds, if, when he left us, he could carry our shiny visitor along with him.

We watched both the man and the snake with an unflagging attention. The former, to my surprise, did not appear to observe the danger that he was in, and I could only account for it when I saw that his eyes were watching my movements, as though fearful that a well-directed shot was to punish him for his intrusion.

The fellow was well armed, I could perceive, for a pair of pistols was stuck in his belt, and a long, glittering knife reposed near them. Once I saw him make a movement with one of his hands towards his belt, as though anxious to try the chances of a shot in my direction, but he apparently altered his mind, and arose to his feet.

I hastily glanced towards the snake; the movement of its long tail ceased, and the reptile coiled itself up as though to escape observation, but the fire of its eyes burned as brightly as ever, and the long fangs were exhibited, as though determined to bite something before long.

Still the stranger did not appear to observe the dangerous position that he was in, for he seemed too much occupied with scrutinizing Fred and myself to attend to objects in his immediate vicinity. Our silence must have struck him with wonder, for after a while he spoke.

"Darn it!" he exclaimed, pettishly, "why don't some of you hail a feller? or are you all struck with a Spanish mildew?"

We returned no answer.

The snake appeared to be as much interested as ourselves, and hardly a motion of his black, glistening skin could I observe; but his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire, so brilliantly did they blaze.

"You can't hail a convoy, hey?" demanded the stranger, in a contemptuous tone; "has my appearance put a stopper on your tongues, or what is the matter?"

We still remained silent, awaiting the finale of so singular a meeting.

"You can talk glib enough when you get with old Brown, and other police fellows, after having shot down the best man in the mines — you know who I mean — and I tell you that he is a better man than either of you two lubbers, squatting there, with faces whiter than a ship's main royal! You know the feller I mean — Pete Burley; he never trembled when a feller hailed him."

We let the ruffian — for his last words convinced me that he had visited us for no good — go on.

The snake had, inch by inch, moved its location, and was partly concealed from the sight of Burley's friend by a barrel. The light, also, was not shed over that portion of the floor, and while every movement of the monster was distinctly revealed to me, the ruffian could not, without stepping towards us, observe it.

"I s'pose you fellers want to know why I am here," the ruffian asked, with a sneer.

I tried to reply, but I could not; my eyes were fastened upon the glowing orbs of the snake, and it seemed to me that if I spoke, he would spring towards me.

"I'll tell ye why I am here, and how I got in. I want to revenge the injury which you have inflicted upon my friend Burley, and I also want to get a few pounds to pay me for the trouble I have taken in his behalf; so just heave ahead and shell out the shiners, and then we'll spin a yarn 'bout other affairs. Interest first, and then satisfaction."

I heard every word that the villain uttered, but if he had drawn a pistol, and offered to have shot me where I stood, I could not have moved a hand in my behalf. I struggled to overcome the feeling, but it was in vain; the glistening, restless eyes of the snake were on me, and seemed to dance with triumph at their thraldom. The tail was motionless now, as though awaiting the result of the conversation.

I wondered that Fred did not come to my relief; but the longer that I looked, the less I thought on the subject, and after a while I began to really enjoy my situation, and to feel surprised that I had considered the monster so terrible. I felt a strange desire to move forward, and fondle the snake, and the eyes that at first seemed so hideous now looked like glittering stones of inestimable value. The black, slimy skin appeared to be of burnished gold, and I thought that if I could but touch it, I should be enriched forever.

Even in my stupor I could hear the loud barking of Rover, on the outside of the building, and it passed through my mind, like an electric shock, that he was uttering a howl for my death. But, like a flash, the bitter feeling that I experienced passed away, and I no longer regretted that I was to die; in fact, I felt rather rejoiced that I was so soon to end my troubles, and it appeared that I had got but a step to move forward, and I should be surrounded with all the pleasures of paradise.

"Why, what is the matter with you two lubbers?" I heard the ruffian ask, the few minutes' silence that had prevailed having startled him; "darn yer eyes, can't one of ye speak, and say that you'll come down with the shiners?"

I could hear the loud breathing of Fred, and I thought that he was trying to answer, but if he did attempt it, the effort was a failure, and the words died in his throat unuttered.

I do not know how long I stood thus silent and motionless, but it seemed to me hours; and each moment I could feel that I was growing weaker and weaker, and more strongly urged forward in the direction of the snake. And then the tail of the monster, which had lain dormant for some time, began to exhibit signs of life, and to form graceful curves in the air, as though enjoying a mighty triumph, or beckoning other monsters to come forward and witness the result of an interview with the lords of the creation.

"Blast your picturs!" exclaimed the ruffian, and I heard him move as though he intended to come towards us.

I could not withdraw my gaze from the snake, and if I should live a thousand years, I never could hope to witness such a gorgeous display as the eyes of the monster exhibited when the sound of footsteps disturbed the silence of the room. Showers of gold, silver, and precious stones, all mingled together, and exhibited by gas light, would be but a poor comparison, when contrasted with the splendor that I thought I observed in the serpent's eyes.

I heard the ruffian take one, two, three steps towards us, and I heard him utter an oath at our apparent indifference, and then, like a flash of lightning, I saw the tail of the snake gleam through the air, and encircle, coil after coil, the stout body of the midnight robber!

I heard a sudden exclamation of horror; a fearful imprecation escaped the lips of the ruffian, and then the wonderful spell, which had bound me for I know not how long, was dissipated, and weak and trembling, I staggered back, and sank upon the floor, too much exhausted to escape from the building, and too much overcome with horror, at the struggle going on before me, to offer aid.

CHAPTER XL.

Death of the Burglar by the Snake.

The struggle that was going on in our room did not prevent me — as I lay upon the floor, too exhausted and faint to assist the ruffian who called himself Pete Burley's friend — from glancing towards Fred, to see how he fared. He appeared to be in the same condition as myself, and was lying upon his side, almost motionless; but his eyes were riveted upon the horrible contortions of the snake, as the ruffian, a powerfully built man, strove to tear off the coils which bound him with fetters that were like steel.

The man's cries and oaths were fierce, but uttered in a gasping tone, as though his very life was being pressed out. Three coils were around him, and each moment I thought that I could see them gradually tighten, but still the resistance of the victim was none the less powerful.

He grasped the snake around the body, and strove, with his powerful hands, to make it yield its death hug; but his efforts seemed to have

no more effect than if he had clinched a bar of iron, or a young sapling. Around they went — the snake with his head upon the floor, his eyes flashing fire, and his mouth expanding, and tongue darting back and forth, and seeming to enjoy the night's adventure as one that was unexpected as well as gratifying.

I saw the ruffian make desperate attempts to reach his knife, which was in his belt; but the coils around him prevented, and in their extremity they turned and staggered around the store, upsetting barrels and boxes, yet all the time I saw that the reptile had the advantage, and could, with a slight exertion of strength, drive his antagonist whither he pleased.

I was as much fascinated with the fight, as I had been with the eyes of the snake, and did not move hand or foot to assist the robber. Even if a shot would have put an end to the combat, I did not dare to fire it, for fear of killing the man; and as for approaching to use our knives, the bare thought was enough to cause a shudder, for the snake managed to keep his head towards us, and with expanded mouth and glistening fangs, appeared to warn us that the fight was a fair one, and that he would brook no interference.

At length I saw the struggling wretch grasp the tail of the reptile with one hand, and seek to unwind the folds that bound him. As well might he have attempted to bend or loosen bars of iron, for with a slight effort the snake freed that portion of his body, and raising his head, hissed, as though with scorn, at the effort of the poor mortal.

The ruffian was not daunted, although a fierce imprecation escaped his lips, as the animal raised his head, and seemed disposed to accomplish the destruction of his antagonist without further delay.

Again did he struggle to get at his knife, and this time, owing to a slight relaxation of the coils around his body, he was successful. I saw the glittering steel flourished in the air, and I saw by the sudden contraction of the serpent's folds, that it was aware that a battle of life and death was now to take place between them.

"Die, d—— you — die," yelled the man, cutting with his knife at various parts of the snake's body.

I saw the hot blood spirt from the wounds, and cover the floor, and I saw that the snake's eyes grew more brilliant than ever, and that he was gradually bringing his head on a level with the face of his antagonist, as though to bite and disfigure his countenance.

Again the keen knife descended, and this time struck deep, for the wounded animal, with a convulsive spring, overturned the ruffian, and together they rolled upon the floor.

I could hear the hard breathing of the man, and I could tell every time that his knife struck home, by a peculiar hiss that escaped the snake. It was like the sudden escape of steam.

"We must now lend some assistance to the poor wretch," said Fred, suddenly starting to his feet, knife in hand. "Do you hold the light, so that I can see where to strike."

"Help me or I die," yelled the ruffian, whose strength began to fail; and he called none too soon, for in spite of his desperate efforts with his knife, the monster had struck one blow, with his fangs, upon his face, and was about to repeat it, as we drew near, light in hand.

The snake raised its head, and shook it menacingly, as we approached. The huge mouth opened, and the quivering tongue darted back and forth, as though warning us not to interfere with what did not concern us; but in spite of its threatening attitude, Fred directed a blow at its head, and the keen steel made a large wound near the reptile's neck.

The hot blood gushed from the wound in torrents; a few drops fell upon my hand, and burned the flesh as though seared with a heated iron.

I saw that the folds of the serpent were gradually relaxing, as though tired of the unequal contest, and the sight gave us renewed courage. Again and again did Fred flesh his steel, and each blow that was struck told upon the life of the monster, and at last, with a convulsive shudder, the tail was uncoiled, straightened out, and with a long-drawn sigh the snake expired.

We did not delay a moment, but went to the assistance of the wounded man. He was covered with blood and slime, and a frightful wound was upon his face, where the fangs of the reptile had struck. He was breathing, but very faintly; so we lost not a moment in placing to his mouth a cup of wine that we fortunately had saved from our supply obtained at Melbourne. The liquor seemed to revive him, for he opened his eyes, and made a desperate effort to speak.

"How fares it with you?" asked Fred.

"The d——d snake has made a finish of me, I believe," he gasped, placing one hand upon his side, as though the effort to speak had caused excruciating pain in that region of his body. "Blast his pictur, how he hugged me!"

"Take another drink of wine," returned Fred, "and then rest until morning, and we will see what can be done for you."

"By morning, mates, I shall be at rest — never fear. A man can't have his heart squeezed into his mouth, and hope to live. But I'm darn glad that I killed the black scoundrel. He'll never *purcel* another sailor with his bloody tail."

"Let us make an examination, and see how much you are wounded," I said, proceeding to strip off his shirt.

"Avast there, shipmate," he cried, in a more feeble voice; "I'm going fast, so don't disturb me."

"But there may be hope — we will run for a physician."

"Of what use would the old sawbones be? Haven't I already been tortured enough? Besides, I've no money to pay for a visit."

"We will attend to that part of the duty," rejoined Fred.

"You will?" demanded the wounded man, in astonishment.

"To be sure."

"Well, all I've got to say is, I'm sorry that I attempted to revenge old Burley's wrongs, and if I could live he might fight for himself — I wouldn't."

"Did the man you call Burley hire you to redress his fancied wrongs?" Fred asked.

"He told me that you both had money, and that if I was a mind to, I could make myself rich, and pay you up for his wound in the hip.

"I'm going," he gasped, at length, "and I feel sorry for my past crimes. Do you believe that there is a hell where sinners burn forever

and ever? Forgive me. I should have murdered you both had it not been for that d——d snake. I crept under the canvas while you were at supper, and while waiting for you to retire, I fell asleep. I am glad that I didn't kill ——. D—— the sn——"

There was a gasping in the man's throat, and with a slight struggle his breath departed, and his soul flew up to God to be judged, and treated according to the crimes which were recorded against his name.

"What's to be done?" asked Fred, when he found that the robber's heart ceased to beat.

"We can do nothing until daylight. Let us go back to bed and try and sleep."

"And wake up and find a snake for a bedfellow? No, I feel that I shall not sleep again for a month. I am almost ready to declare that I will not stop another day at Ballarat, or in Australia. We have met with nothing but dangers since our landing, and it seems that on each occasion our lives have been spared as by a miracle."

"I can feel only too grateful that they are spared, without questioning the means," I replied. "Whether a gracious Providence, or our shrewdness, has prevented us from being food for worms, is a subject we will not discuss."

"But I feel tired of this kind of life," Fred said, as he seated himself upon his bed and looked around the floor, covered with blood, and the bodies of the huge snake and the dead man. "A few weeks ago there was nothing that I liked so well as an adventure, but now I am surfeited, and would fain enjoy a respite. A few weeks of inactivity would not come amiss, for ever since we have been on the island we have seen nothing, heard of nothing, but blood. I am sick of it."

"Well?" I inquired, anxiously.

"I will adhere to the vow that I took before leaving California. We swore then never to desert each other, either in sickness or in health. Until you are content to leave Australia, I remain. That is settled upon."

We shook hands, and bound the bargain, and as we did so, the light that had wavered and flickered, and revealed the desperate fight between the robber and the snake, suddenly died out, and left us in darkness.

And then we heard gentle steps upon the floor, and a snuffing, as though some animal was pawing over the bodies, and while we were listening to discover who our new visitor was, I felt something cold touch my hand, and I started in alarm; but my fears quickly vanished, for I found that Rover had recovered from his fright, and had come back in search of his master. The poor dog! I could not blame him for deserting us, considering the character of our late visitor.

The brute curled down beside us, and sat and listened to our conversation through the night, but during that period his ears were raised as though waiting a repetition of the sound that had alarmed him hours before.

"I saw you move your hand towards your revolver," I said, addressing Fred; "why did you not use it before the snake attacked the poor fellow?"

"Because, while looking at the monster, a feeling came over me that

I cannot at this moment account for. I had regarded the snake with the utmost dread and abhorrence, until all at once I thought that I did not appear to look upon him with the same disgust, and the longer that I gazed, the more fascinated I became, and I could not have harmed the reptile, had my life depended upon my actions."

It was singular, but his feelings were the same that I had experienced, and I refer the matter to scientific gentlemen, and desire them to solve the question. Can a black snake, by the aid of lamp light, fascinate two men, separated a distance of three yards, so that they lose all mastery over their actions, and are impelled, by a power that appears uncontrollable, to approach an object that they most dread on earth?

It seems a strange story, yet it is a true one. I will give the dimensions of the reptile, so that the public may know that it was no puny monster. Its length was exactly thirteen feet, five inches and a quarter, and its circumference was thirteen inches and a half. The snake was of the Diamond species, and grows quite large in Australia. I have heard of even larger ones being destroyed, but I thank fortune that I never met them during my residence. Their bites are not of a poisonous nature, but their fangs are so large and strong that they inflict an awkward wound; and in one case, when a miner was bitten, all efforts to stop the flow of blood were futile, and the poor fellow bled to death.

This occurred at Ballarat, soon after we located in that cheerful place, and Fred and myself were both sent for to investigate the case. We judged that the fangs of the snake had struck an artery, and this supposition, I have, since my return to this country, found to be correct.

There is quite a number of species of the serpent tribe in Australia, whose bite is death; but there is one kind, of a bright orange color, with a dark ring around the neck, that is very venomous. I once saw a miner bitten by one, and in defiance of all exertions that were made to save his life, the poor fellow died in less than an hour. We cauterized the wound with a hot iron, and at the same time compelled him to swallow huge draughts of raw whiskey; but to no purpose. In twenty minutes after he was bitten, the miner began to swell—in half an hour he could not swallow another drop of liquor, although what he had taken apparently had no effect upon him. In three quarters of an hour he was speechless, and in fifty-five minutes he was dead. That was quick work for the poison, and proves that the snakes of Australia are more venomous than the rattlesnake of America. Luckily, the orange colored snakes are not numerous, and I only saw three during my residence on the island, and I suffer no compunctions of conscience when I acknowledge that I assisted to kill them.

But the saddest part of the story connected with the miner's death remains to be told. After he was dead, no one would go near him, or assist to give the body a decent burial. Fred offered a handsome sum to any one who would do so, but all declined, until an American, whose heart was not contaminated by bad influence, gathered pieces of boards and made a coffin, and then assisted us to dig a grave on the hill-side, where we deposited the remains of the unfortunate man, to take his last rest.

Fred and I sat in the dark, conversing in a low tone, and starting at every sound, expecting to hear the slimy crawling of another snake;

but in this we were disappointed, and happily so. As soon as daylight appeared, we started towards the hut of the inspector, situated at no great distance from our so-called store. Mr. Brown was asleep when we called, and it was with some difficulty that we aroused him.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, at length, raising his head from his hard couch, and rubbing his eyes; "what's the matter? The store hasn't burned down, has it, and destroyed all the stock in trade?"

"Worse than that," returned Fred.

"Then a great misfortune must have occurred. What is it? If I can assist in any thing, I'll get up; if not, I'm going to sleep an hour or two longer. The miners had a meeting last evening, and what with bad rum and long resolutions, they kept me pretty busy until an hour since."

"Then make up your mind that you'll have no more sleep until our business is finished. Come, get up and take breakfast with us," Fred rejoined.

"That invitation is sufficient to make a hungry man forget sleep for a week. I'm with you."

The inspector gave himself a shake, and was dressed and ready to accompany us. He left word with one of his men, who was on duty, where he could be found in case he was wanted, and then declared that he was ready.

As we walked along, we told him of the visit that we had received the night before, and he listened without any expression of astonishment. When we reached the store things remained as we had left them, with blood scattered over the floor, and on the overturned boxes and barrels, while nearly side by side were the bodies of the snake and the robber.

Mr. Brown stooped down and examined the face of the corpse for a few minutes attentively.

"I knew that fellow would come to some bad end," the inspector said, "for he was a friend of Burley's, and many a robbery have they committed together, that never came to light."

"You might have cautioned us against him," remarked Fred.

"So I might, had I but known he was in Ballarat. I have not seen or heard of the fellow before for two months, and I thought that he was either shot or hanged, as he certainly should have been a year ago. He must have arrived here yesterday afternoon, and Burley told him that you had money, and that he could make a good thing in avenging his injuries and stealing your gold. I am glad to say that he was caught in his own trap, and I shall always cherish the name of a diamond snake for the good that one of them has done in ridding us of a ruffian who would have robbed his mother, and beat her in the bargain."

"But the snake—what do you think of that?" we asked.

"I have seen larger ones, though I will quiet your fears by saying not in this part of Australia. They are not so dangerous as they look, and seldom attack a man unless frightened into the encounter. A few miles from Ballarat is a colony of the same kind of reptiles, and it's something of a curiosity to see the monsters squirming about during a pleasant forenoon."

"Have you seen them often?" asked Fred.

"O, yes, I have seen them a dozen times, perhaps."

"We have nothing of importance to attend to, for a few days, and would like to visit the colony. Will you go with us?"

"Willingly," replied the inspector. "Appoint your day."

"Say to-morrow forenoon. Our horses will feel better for the jaunt, and so shall we," Fred said.

"To-morrow forenoon we will go; and now, before we take breakfast, let us get rid of these encumbrances."

He pointed to the bodies on the floor, and while we were wondering what we should do with them, the inspector called a policeman, and directed him to find a cart and carry them off, and for all that we know to the contrary, they were both buried in the same grave. At any rate, the skin of the snake, which we had requested as a trophy, was returned to us, and by the aid of a quantity of arsenic, we were enabled to preserve it, and send it to Murden as a sample of one of the staple articles of the mines.

As soon as the bodies were removed, we went to work and cleaned our store, and then prepared breakfast, and I am happy to be able to record it, that the horrors of the night had no sensible effect upon our appetites.

CHAPTER XLI.

Visit to Snakes' Paradise.

We spent the day in idleness, for the adventures of the preceding night were too harrowing to allow our minds to become settled on any kind of work. It is true that we had many questions to answer, and that numerous visitors thronged our store from sunrise until dark; but after repeating our story to our friend Charley, he took upon himself the important situation of narrator of the snake's doings, and by that means we were entirely relieved of a disagreeable duty.

Our California friend — never a great stickler for truth — embellished his version of the affair in such glowing colors, and set forth the courage that we had displayed in the fight in such a guise that we really began to think that our conduct was not so very tame, after all, and that we were worthy of the congratulations showered upon us by the admiring miners, who vowed that when our stock of goods was in, we were the men for their money.

At length, however, the last visitor had taken his departure, with the exception of Charley. He hung around, as though he had some important duty yet unperformed, but what it was we were at a loss to know until he disclosed it.

"We did pretty well, didn't we?" he asked, taking a seat by our rickety supper table.

"In getting the crowd off? Yes, we feel much obliged to you," Fred rejoined.

"O, tain't that. I mean 'bout making the fellers believe all I told um."

"Why, I must say that I think you disregarded the truth slightly, in your account of the adventures."

"O, I know that I did; but don't you see that it was all 'cos I wanted to make ye popular with the masses, and one of these days you'll get elevated to pay for it. I knew that you fellers was frightened to death when you seed the snake, but of course I wasn't going to say so, 'cos if I had, it would have sp'ilt all. O, no; I know'd better than all that, by a long chalk. Putty good coffee this, ain't it?"

We were silent with astonishment and admiration at his matchless impudence.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to let us know how you knew we were frightened?" Fred asked, coolly.

"Certainly — 'cos I met one of the same darned things, and I run like the devil. Fact, although you may not believe it. I don't fight snakes, if I can get clear of um."

The man's answer was so characteristic of human nature, that we could but smile at the honest expression, and were not disposed to quarrel with him for giving vent to the same feeling that would have actuated us in another encounter.

"I s'pose you won't mind coming down an ounce for the service I've rendered you to-day," Charley said, after a pause.

"For what service?" I demanded, in astonishment.

"O, for making you popular, that's all," he repeated.

"Look here, my friend," Fred said; "it seems to me that you think we are two log-rolling politicians, anxious to turn every thing of an exciting nature to an advantage. In this you are disappointed. We are here to get money, and not to get office."

"Well, ain't I here to make money, too? so where's the difference between us? You open a store; I sell rum, and starve boarders, and electioneer, so that you can have a great run of custom, and yet you ain't willing to pay a man a fair sum for his work. Wall, if I ain't almost riddy to forswear my kintry and turn Turk. It's too aggravating — it is."

Our friend looked as though he was a martyr to friendship, yet I saw that he was only acting in a systematic manner, to excite our sympathies, and procure the reward that he anticipated.

"Here is the money," Fred said, after a moment's hesitancy, handing a Spanish doubloon to the cute Yankee, who clutched at it like a hungry shark.

"All right," he replied, pocketing the gold with a chuckle.

"And now, before you go, we wish to say one word," Fred remarked, calmly, yet firmly. "Ever since we have been at Ballarat, you have contrived a number of ways to swindle us of our money. What you have received we don't wish back into our pockets; but we do give you warning that hereafter, if you interfere in our affairs, we shall take the liberty of administering a sound kicking to that portion of your anatomy made to be kicked. We hope that you understand us with distinctness, and that we shall not be called upon to put into execution our threat. Good day."

The fellow sneaked from the store like a petty thief caught in the act, and during our residence at the mines, he always declared that he didn't think much of aristocrats taking the bread out of the mouths of

honest workmen, and that for his part, he should like to know from what part of New England we came.

We spent the day, as I said before, in idleness, yet we did not forget that we had an appointment with the inspector, the next morning. Our horses were in fine condition and anxious for a run, and as we rubbed them down and fed them the night before we were to start, they appeared to know that a journey was contemplated, and whinnied with joy.

As there was to be a monster meeting of the miners, that night, to consider what action should be taken in regard to the mining tax, we determined to be present — not for the purpose of taking any part in the deliberations of the people — but to see how such matters were conducted in Australia.

We therefore left Rover to attend to the horses, and prevent their being stolen while absent, and about eight o'clock we joined the throng of miners flocking towards the place designated for the meeting.

It was an out-door affair, and about one thousand people were present, and a rougher looking set of men I never saw in my life. All nations were there. Even a number of Chinamen, who couldn't understand ten words of English, and knew not what they shouted for, were in the crowd, wooden shoes, pig-tails and all. Manillamen, with long black hair, white teeth, and dark skins, and murderous looking knives by their sides, were present, and jabbered in the *Mestisa* tongue, which no one understood but themselves. Then there were Lascars, Arabs, and other countrymen, known by their peculiar dress and talk, and loud above the tumult could be heard the oaths uttered in good old Saxon, or else with a brogue that showed that the Gem of the Ocean had its representatives, who, as usual, were ready for a drink or a fight, but preferred the latter.

The chairman of the meeting was a Scotchman, who occupied a conspicuous position on a bank of earth, overlooking the audience, and who, fortunately being blessed with strong lungs, shouted, "Order, order," whenever the miners grew too quarrelsome, or had more than two fights going on at the same time.

An Irishman, whose clothes might have been bought at a second hand dealer's for a very moderate sum — for they were rent in various places, and no attempt had been made to patch them — was the first speaker, and he howled in the most approved manner, and even our political friends might have taken a lesson from him. He had not spoken two minutes before he denounced England as the worst nation upon the face of the earth, and considered Englishmen as lions and brutes, while Irishmen were every thing that was amiable and intelligent.

He was about to declare that an Irishman could lick a dozen Britons, when an indignant Englishman planted a blow upon his nose that knocked him headlong from the box on which he was standing.

The chairman called order, but did not appear surprised at the turn which things had taken.

The next speaker was a Scotch miner, who declared that he was no slave, and was not afraid to let the Governor General of Australia know it. He thought that if there was an Eden in this world, that

Scotland would have to be visited to find it. He declared that he had rather live in his native country, and subsist upon oatmeal porridge, than remain in Australia and dig gold, and that the reason he paid a mining tax, was because he wanted to encourage the English to continue their outrages.

The next speaker was our late friend Charley. He alluded to the American Eagle, touched on Bunker Hill, eulogized the Declaration of Independence, admired the Revolution, and then artfully proceeded to depicture the prosperity that Australia would be likely to enjoy, if separated from the mother country, and become a republic. Then, he said, taxation would be equal, and money would not be wrung from the hard-working miners to support governors and other officials in luxury. While Mr. Charley was shouting with all his might, and trying to infuse a little of his own warmth into his hearers, a little, decrepit old man, with long, gray hair and shabby clothes, edged towards us, as though to enter into conversation.

"Well, I don't know but the man is right," the old man said, after listening a few minutes in silence. His dialect was broad Yorkshire, and we mentally concluded that he belonged in that part of England.

"There's a great dale in havin' independence, and all that. What d'ye think about it?"

The interrogation was addressed so pointedly that there was no chance to escape without an answer; but we had lived too long in foreign countries to commit ourselves on any question that was likely to cause us trouble.

"We have not given the subject a thought to-day. When we have made up our minds, we will let you know," returned Fred.

"Well, that is singular," the old man returned; "I always supposed that ye 'Mericans was riddy to declare that yer own country was the best. But don't ye think that Australia would make a great addition to the States?"

"We don't care to talk on the subject," rejoined Fred, shortly, seeing that a number of miners began to gather around, to listen to the discussion.

"That is capital," whispered a voice that we knew; "I am glad to see that you take no interest in the knave's fancies."

We felt a strong pressure on our arms, as though the speaker would have added other tokens of his approval, had he dared, and before we could recover from our surprise, the little old man was edging his way into the thickest of the crowd.

"Did you suspect him?" whispered Fred.

"No, he altered his voice too much. We owe Mr. Brown a trick for the one he has just played on us."

In fact, the little old man with the Yorkshire accent was no other than Mr. Inspector Brown, who was disguised so perfectly, that we should not have recognized him, even in broad daylight.

He was mingling with the crowd, and "spotting" the most turbulent, for the purpose of refusing to grant them a license, when next they applied. He went upon the principle that a few agitators were sufficient to corrupt the morals of all the miners in Ballarat, and to get them to leave for other parts was Mr. Brown's whole study.

We did not wait to hear more of Charley's harangue, for we were too tired to enjoy his artful attempts to excite the miners in opposition to the government.

The night passed off without any incident worthy of notice, and by daylight we were astir, and preparing for our expedition.

Shortly after sunrise the inspector joined us, mounted on a very fair horse, but not equal to the nags that we owned.

We were off without delay — leaving Rover to tend the store — although we did not forget to examine our revolvers before we started, for the inspector hinted that there might be such a thing as meeting a bushranger who would feel disposed to borrow our horses, or take our lives, just as his fancy seemed to lead him.

"How did the meeting terminate, last night?" I asked, after we had got clear of the town, and were ascending a high hill, at a slow pace.

"O, after your precious countryman got through with his great annexation speech, there was quite a brisk fight between half-a-dozen of the men present, and then the meeting broke up in a row. No arrests were made, for if I had offered to take any one into custody, I should have been ill-treated, and raised a tumult that could not have easily been suppressed. I bide my time, and think of the day when government will have a force here sufficient to resist all attacks."

We laughed at Mr. Brown's tirade against our countryman, and then joked him on the cleverness of his disguise, and promised to pay him in his own coin. He dared us to the experiment, and we mentally promised that we would keep our word.

For almost two hours we continued our journey, sometimes passing through deep valleys, which, in winter months, were green with verdure, but now were dry and parched for the want of moisture; and sometimes ascending high hills, from the summits of which we could command a view of the country for many miles in extent.

Not a soul had we met since leaving the borders of the town, and with the exception of one or two animals, game appeared to be very scarce.

"How much farther have we to go for a sight of the 'Snakes' Paradise'?" Fred inquired.

"Only about a mile. At the foot of the hill the den is located, unless the reptiles have changed their quarters since I was here last."

The inspector pointed with his whip to the spot indicated, and for a few minutes we drew rein and admired the scenery.

At our feet was a deep valley, which, in the winter season, received the washings of the mountains that completely surrounded it, and the soil evidently retained the water for some time, for we could see where it had settled or evaporated, and we asked ourselves the question, —

"Did the snakes take up their quarters in the valley for the purpose of being near fresh water for about nine months in the year?"

Mr. Brown only shook his head, and said that he was not versed in "snakeology," hut thought that if the reptiles remained in the valley, it was a sign that they liked to take a drink occasionally, and proposed that we should descend.

We assented, but before we did so, we took another survey of the scene before us. As I said before, the valley was surrounded by hills,

and the only outlet was by means of a ragged ravine, through which the water had forced its way, and extended to another plain about half a mile distant. The hills opposite to us were nearly perpendicular, and their summit could only be gained by immense exertion on the part of a person on foot. The only places where horses could escape, or leave the valley, was by means of the ravine, or the path we were about to descend.

I have been thus particular in describing the locality of Snakes' Paradise, as we named it, because we met with an incident there, which I shall relate in another chapter.

We were obliged to dismount from our animals, when half-way down the mountain, for we found that the trail was very insecure, and that a proper regard for our necks demanded a descent on foot. The horses, freed from our encumbrance, got along very well, and much faster than when guided by reins; but we found that, as we neared the foot of the hill, the animals manifested considerable reluctance to proceeding farther, and that some energy was required to prevent their retracing their steps up the ascent.

At length, however, we reached even ground, and again mounted our restive animals, and led by the inspector, approached a mound of earth, about fifteen or twenty feet high, and eight or ten feet in circumference. It was in the form of a pyramid, and resembled the work of man more than nature, and I turned to the inspector for an explanation.

"What motive could a man have for forming earth in that shape?" I asked.

"That was never built by human beings, but by insects, more industrious than the lords of creation. That pyramid of earth was once the home of millions of black ants, and by them alone was it raised."

I had heard of the wonderful industry of the ants of Australia, but this was the first time that I ever saw their works. I felt curious to examine one of their homes, and touched my horse for the purpose of riding nearer. To my surprise the animal refused to move in the direction that I wished, and the more I urged, the less inclined he was to obey. I was not disposed to give up the contest, and was making preparations to continue with more vigor, when Mr. Brown stopped me.

"It's useless," he said, "to try and get the horses nearer the pyramid. They scent danger before we are aware of its presence. If you wish to inspect the place you must dismount."

"But why should the animals be afraid of ants?" Fred asked.

"They are not afraid of ants," replied the inspector, dryly, "but they are afraid of snakes."

"But we can see no snakes, although you told us that their den was near the foot of the mountain."

"What does that look like?" asked Mr. Brown, pointing to a dark object that was slowly creeping from an opening in the pyramid.

We saw at once that the object was a snake, such as we had encountered at the store, and we watched his languid movements with some curiosity. The reptile had no sooner drawn his body from the mound than another snake of the same species poked his head out, and after surveying us for a few seconds with an appearance of considerable

curiosity, he, too, quitted the pyramid, and stretched his long body in the hot sand, as though it was grateful to his slimy skin.

Another and another followed in slow succession, until we counted no less than twenty black snakes, none of them less than thirteen feet long, and from ten to fifteen inches in circumference. They appeared to be as playful as puppies, and rolled over and over each other in their gambols; but at the least movement on our part their sport ceased, and they seemed to form themselves in hostile array as though to repel an attack. Then their mouths opened and their huge fangs were exposed, glistening in the sun, as though anxious to try their strength upon our bodies.

It was with some difficulty that we could get our horses to face the monsters, and even with all our exertions the animals would suddenly start, as though anxious to quit so loathsome a sight.

"Do ants and snakes live peaceably together in Australia?" I asked of the inspector.

"By no means. They are continually at war, but the insects struggle with desperate valor to maintain their homestead against their assailants; but in the end they have to retire and build another pyramid, where they live until a fresh colony of snakes appear and drive them forth wanderers once more. The fight, however, lasts nearly a week before the insects acknowledge defeat, and if, during that time, the snakes wound each other in trying to free their bodies of the ants, it is a great triumph for the latter, for they fasten upon the wound, and all the twisting and squirming of the reptiles cannot dislodge them. For days they fatten upon their victim, until at length the slight wound becomes a sore of great magnitude, and never heals. Mortification at length ensues, and the death of the snake is then certain. You can see that if the insects are weak and insignificant, nature teaches them a method of avenging their wrongs, and they are not slow to adopt it."

As we found that it was impossible to get our horses to approach the nest of reptiles, we got the inspector to hold them while Fred and myself advanced, revolvers in hand, to get a nearer view of the squirming monsters. They instantly arrayed themselves in a compact mass, and with flashing eyes and erect heads watched our motions. Every few seconds they would utter a hiss, that sounded like an expression of displeasure in a theatre during some bad piece of acting. We advanced to within ten rods of them, and then halted and surveyed them at leisure.

"I should like to try the effects of a shot," Fred said, glancing at the snakes and then at his revolver.

"Fire away," I replied, as anxious for the fun as himself.

In spite of a warning cry from Mr. Brown, Fred discharged his revolver, and the ball struck in the mass of squirming bodies. I saw one huge monster tear himself loose from the others, and wind his body into knots, and beat the ground with rage with his tapered tail, while his hot blood dyed the ground as it gushed forth during his contortions.

"Try another," said Fred, enjoying his own shot.

I also fired, and the same result followed. The wounded snake either struggled, or else was forced from the mass, and the same bold front

was kept up by the others. The hissing, if possible, was a little louder, and the eyes of those uninjured flashed brighter, but the mass did not move forward, or recede from our attack; and it was not until we had each discharged five barrels of our revolvers that a movement, as though determined to revenge their loss, was made.

CHAPTER XLII.

FLIGHT FROM THE SNAKES.—ATTACKED BY THE BUSHRANGERS.

SLOWLY, but in a compact form, did the snakes creep forward, hissing, and expanding their huge mouths, and darting out their forked tongues, which quivered like a million of grasshoppers strung upon steel wires, and exposed to a strong breeze.

"Come back, you ——." The rest of the sentence was inarticulate, but I think it sounded like "fools."

We glanced at the inspector, and found that he was in full retreat with the horses, evidently being disposed to be on the safe side.

"Let us give them one more shot, and be off," said Fred.

He was about to carry his words into effect, when a thought suddenly struck me, and I lowered my revolver.

"Fred," I said, "did you put your powder flask in your pocket?"

"No, for I supposed that you did," he replied.

"Then let me advise you to reserve your fire, for we have but one shot each, and it is a long way to camp."

I had hardly delivered the caution, when we found that it was full time to beat a retreat. The snakes, still showing signs of anger, had crept to within ten yards of us, and I thought, from a hasty observation, that they were preparing to separate, and make a spring.

"Now, then, for a run!" cried Fred; and we turned our backs upon our enemies, and started towards the horses as fast as our legs could carry us.

I glanced over my shoulder to see what action the snakes were taking, and to my horror I found that they had separated, and were pursuing us with inconceivable rapidity. Their huge heads were raised about eighteen inches from the ground, and their wide mouths were expanded as though grinning at our flight.

"Run faster," yelled the inspector, who was watching the novel race, seated on his horse.

We tried to obey, but found that we were putting our best energies to the work, and therefore could not increase our pace. It seemed to me that I was shod with lead, my feet felt so heavy.

"Run, run, run!" yelled the inspector, endeavoring to urge the horses towards us; but the brutes resisted with all their might, and he was obliged to relinquish the attempt.

I again looked over my shoulder, and saw that we did not increase the distance between us and our loathsome foes, but I felt a little hope at the thought of their not gaining on us. Ten rods more, and we should be within range of the inspector's revolver, and perhaps he could check the snakes' pursuit.

Even while these thoughts passed through my brain, I saw one of the most active of our pursuers suddenly stop, raise one half of his long body from the ground, in an upright direction, and then spring forward, at least twenty feet, and far in advance of his competitors. Two more such springs, and we would be enfolded in his embrace. Again he raised his black, shining form, and was about to repeat the attempt, when we heard the sharp crack of Mr. Brown's revolver.

To my joy, I saw that the inspector's aim was true, for the reptile, just as he was about to repeat his spring, was struck by the ball, and rolled over and over, lashing the ground with his tail, and causing his companions to suddenly stop, as though desirous of seeing what the matter was.

It is very certain that Fred and myself did not stop to learn what conclusion the snakes came to; in less than a minute after the shot was fired, we were beside our horses and mounted.

"Well, of all the fellows for getting into scrapes, you two are the worst!" cried the inspector, with an air of vexation; "didn't you know that those cussed black devils could run faster than a man?"

"This is the first that we ever heard about it," rejoined Fred, completely at his ease.

"Well, now that I have told you, let us be getting clear of the clan, for there is no knowing how soon the varmints may recommence another pursuit," and the inspector turned his horse's head, as though he was determined to remain no longer in such a dangerous neighborhood.

"Don't be in such a hurry," said Fred; "we have an inclination towards natural history, and now is a good time to take lessons. I want to see if the snakes will follow a man on horseback as readily as when he is on foot."

"Are you determined to get choked to death by those dark scamps?" demanded Mr. Brown, with a stare of amazement.

"By no means; we want to prevent others from suffering such a death, and therefore feel that we have a mission for killing all that we can with safety. There's ten or twelve of them left. Lend me your revolver, for mine has but one charge in it."

Fred held out his hand to receive the weapon, and Mr. Brown, hardly knowing whether he was joking or not, complied with his request.

The snakes were holding a consultation over the body of the last one killed, and therefore paid but little attention to Fred, as he urged his unwilling horse within shooting distance. I remained by the side of Mr. Brown, and watched his operations.

At the first discharge of his revolver the consultation was broken up, and after hissing their displeasure, the reptiles commenced slowly retreating to their den; but every few seconds they would stop, face him, and then another discharge would start them into full flight.

As they neared the pyramid — what there was left of them — their speed increased, until it seemed to be a race as to which should get

under cover first. But the most surprising circumstance was the uninjured ones refusing to allow a maimed one to enter, and every time that it persisted in its attempt, the others fought him desperately.

That was something that I could not account for; but Mr. Brown said that the reptiles were only imitating human beings in their treatment of a comrade, and that as long as a snake was well, and able to fight, the main body were willing to use him; but after he was wounded, and wanted shelter, there was a conspiracy to kick him out of their comfortable quarters.

Fred returned with but one barrel of the revolver loaded, and that he saved because the inspector was in the same condition as ourselves, having left his powder and ball at Ballarat.

"Now, then, let us return," Mr. Brown said; "you have shed blood enough for one day, I hope."

The words had hardly passed his lips, when, upon the top of the mountain that we had descended two hours before, I saw the forms of five or six men stealing along the trail, as though desirous of gaining the cover of a number of trees, for the purpose of watching our movements.

I pointed them out to the inspector, and he stopped and examined them through a pocket spy-glass which he usually carried when he left town.

"Well, are they friends or foes?" asked Fred.

The inspector made no reply until the men were lost to view beneath the branches of the trees.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that you left your powder and lead at Ballarat?"

"Quite sure — why do you ask?"

"Because, unfortunately, there are six as great rascals as ever went unhung on the hill, and they mean mischief, I'll swear."

The inspector put up his glass, and examined his nearly-emptied revolver with a rueful look.

"If the blasted snakes had not wasted our powder there would be some show for us," he continued, "because, luckily, the scamps are armed with pistols only."

"But we have three shots," cried Fred, his blood beginning to dance through his veins at the prospect of a struggle; "I will guarantee that every discharge brings down a bird, and as for the remainder, why, we will meet them single-handed."

"I like to hear you talk in that strain, but the odds are against us. We have a long hill to ascend, and should have to leave our horses behind, and that I can't think of. The bushrangers, I suppose, desire the animals for the purpose of escaping to some other portion of the country, and even at the risk of running from a fight, we must disappoint them. No, no; it would be madness attacking six men with empty revolvers, when they have the choice of ground."

The inspector returned his revolver to his belt, and once more examined the spot where the robbers had gone into ambush.

"Yes, they are watching our every motion, and I can see one fellow standing near the trunk of the first tree on our right examining his pistols attentively. Now he looks towards us, and points with his hand in the direction of the ravine. It is our only chance."

He closed the glass abruptly and put spurs to his horse, calling upon us to follow him without a moment's delay. We suspected Mr. Brown's intentions, but did not consider the danger so imminent as he imagined. We therefore galloped along at a moderate pace, and allowed the inspector to take the lead.

"Faster, faster," he shouted, looking over his shoulder to see if we kept up with him.

"What is your hurry?" cried Fred, with a provoking degree of coolness.

"Because there is need of it," Mr. Brown answered, reining his animal in for the purpose of allowing us to get alongside of him. "Those bushrangers have noted the road we have taken, and will seek to cut off our retreat. Our only safety now lies in getting through the ravine before they can gain a position to fire at us. Ah, I thought so. Look there."

The inspector pointed to the hill top, and there we saw all six of the robbers running at a rapid rate towards the edge of the ravine. The latter was about six feet deep, and it was easy to see the advantage such a position would give them; for while they could fire at us with awful accuracy, we could not return a shot with any hope of success.

"We are with you," cried Fred, striking his horse with his spurs, and forward we all went at a killing pace.

The bushrangers saw that they were discovered, and raised a shout of triumph, as though certain that we were within their toils. I heard the inspector utter a bitter curse at his stupidity in leaving his powder and bullets behind, and that was the only answer to the challenge.

The ravine was about thirty feet wide, and like all places where a large body of water has forced its way, was rugged, and difficult for horses to tread. Huge rocks and deep gullies were met at every step, and the utmost caution was requisite to prevent our animals from breaking their legs, or refusing to move forward at a pace faster than a walk.

For the first few minutes after entering the passage we anticipated a discharge over our heads every moment; but finding that the bushrangers did not take advantage of our situation, and that we were unmolested, we had time to wonder at their forbearance, and to suggest to Mr. Brown that perhaps we were more frightened than hurt.

"Not a bit of it," he rejoined. "I tell you that the scamps have not given up the chase so easy, and that all our trouble is to come at the outlet of the ravine. The only reason we have escaped so far, is because we were too quick to enable them to reach the edge of the bluff at the entrance. We shall hear from the devils, never fear, and before long, I am thinking.

"Press on," cried the inspector, as the outlet of the ravine came in view; "we may defeat the devils yet."

Unlucky words, for hardly had he uttered them when a sharp crack from the top of the cliff was heard, and a ball whizzed within a few inches of my face, and struck the nag upon which the inspector was mounted. The animal plunged forward for a few steps, and then suddenly rearing, fell back heavily, crushing the left leg of Mr. Brown, and jamming it between the saddle and the earth.

"On," cried the wounded man, faintly; "save yourselves, if possible, and leave me."

"You must have a poor opinion of Americans if you expect us to do that," cried Fred, with as much coolness as I ever saw him exhibit in my life.

And even while my friend was speaking, to my great admiration he dismounted, letting his horse go wherever it desired to wander — for he knew that no shot would be aimed at that which the bushrangers most desired — and rushed to aid the fallen inspector.

I could do no less than follow his example, although I confess that I considered my time as having nearly arrived, when I got off my horse, and even when attempting to roll the dying animal from the body of the inspector, I wondered why the deuse the bushrangers did not pick us off without mercy. We were certainly in their power; but I afterwards understood that five of the bushrangers were, at that particular moment, engaged in damning the sixth, who had, by his aim, killed a horse instead of a man. Although I don't approve of swearing, yet I must confess that after this I must consider that there is some virtue in oaths, for they saved not only my life, but my friend's.

Luckily for Mr. Brown, the horse died very quickly, and did not struggle, or the body of the inspector would have been ground to powder, and Ballarat would have required the services of another police commissioner. We rolled the animal off, and then quickly lifted the wounded man in our arms, and carried him for shelter under the bank, where the villains overhead could not get sight of us.

"How fares it with you?" asked Fred, making an examination of the injured limb.

"Bad enough," replied Mr. Brown, with a sigh. "I don't think that any bones are broken, but the flesh is awfully bruised."

"That is true enough," answered Fred, tearing his handkerchief into strips, and binding up the bleeding limb with as much coolness as a professional surgeon; "the flesh is mangled, but it will heal in less time than a broken limb, and I must congratulate you on your lucky escape."

"Lucky escape?" repeated the inspector, bitterly; "you talk as though we were not surrounded by six bloodthirsty scamps, who will greatly rejoice to make a prisoner of me. Why did you not escape when my horse fell? You could have done so."

"We grant that; yet we Americans have peculiar notions regarding some things, and we are apt to call a man a coward who deserts a friend in distress. We sink or swim in the same boat, to-day."

The inspector faintly squeezed our hands, and a gratified expression beamed upon his face, yet his pain was too great to allow him to reply; and Fred and myself began to consult how we could bring into play the early lessons which we had learned while mining in California, and surrounded by tribes of hostile Indians.

We were no longer bound to regard the advice of the inspector, even if he had been disposed to offer it, which he was not, and after a slight deliberation we came to a conclusion, and resolved to act upon it. For this purpose we removed Mr. Brown to a place of greater security, and after informing him that we should not be far off, and that he was to

remain silent until our return, we crept along under the bank for some distance, stopping every few minutes for the purpose of listening, yet making no noise by our movements.

The ravine, as I said before, led between two high hills, and each bank was perpendicular, and covered, at the edges, with small gum trees. There was only one place on the left bank, where the bushrangers were stationed, that could be descended, and unless the ruffians made an attempt to reach us by that single place, they would be compelled to go a mile or two to descend the hill, and then enter the ravine at the outlet. By attempting to surprise us by entering the ravine the way that we did, the distance would be greater and more difficult. We therefore reasoned that the bushrangers, after waiting an hour or more, and finding that we made no stir, would attempt to secure the two horses that were quietly grazing nearly opposite the place where the bank was most shelving, and that they would seek for the quickest way of accomplishing their object. We therefore resolved to station ourselves near the animals, and see what would happen.

By good fortune we found a large ridge of earth, formed like a shelf, about four feet wide, which the water had gullied out when rushing through the ravine, during the winter months — and under this we stationed ourselves, and waited patiently, well aware that we were secure from observation from our enemies, unless some of them happened to be on the opposite bank, which we did not expect.

Half an hour passed, and there were no signs of the enemy. Our horses had approached us once or twice, but as we paid no attention to them, they had wandered off, and were standing in the shade of the west bank for the purpose of getting rid of some of the insects which were hovering in the air, and biting with a sharpness that proved they had been without food for many days.

We were almost in despair of our plan succeeding, when we heard a crashing overhead, as though a number of heavy-footed men were stepping upon dried branches, and did not care who heard them. Suddenly there was a silence, as though the party had halted to view the very place we anticipated they would look at, and then a voice exclaimed: —

"D—— it, what can you say to that place, I'd like to know?"

"Ah, Bill, I've got nothin' to offer agin that place, 'cos it's suthin like. A man can get down there without trouble."

"Well, then, down you go, and lead the horses out of the ravine, and wait for us," cried a man who appeared to have some authority with the bushrangers.

"But I want somebody to go with me, don't I? S'pose the fellers should make a jump at me?" cried the man, who was evidently the slave of the gang.

"But they won't make a jump at you, 'cos they are at the other end of the ravine, looking after Brown. Get hold of the horses, and then we shall have um at our mercy."

"All right, Bill; I'll go, 'cos I killed the hoss, when I meant to kill one of those d——d Yankee chaps. I thought that I had him sure, but my pistols didn't carry straight."

It seemed that the party knew us, and had followed us ever since we

had left Ballarat, for the purpose of robbing us of our horses, and probably murdering us, into the bargain.

We heard the bushranger selected for the purpose, commence descending slowly, for the task was one of considerable difficulty, and required some caution. His comrades stood upon the bank and joked him for being so long, and at length we concluded that they had stretched themselves upon the grass to wait until he had performed his work; for their voices became nearly inaudible, although we could hear the fellow who was approaching us grunt and swear at the obstacles which he had to overcome.

Fred's brow grew black as he unsheathed his long knife, and passed a finger across the blade to test its keenness.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked, fearful of his reply.

"Preserve our lives at the expense of the scoundrels," he answered, in a whisper. "Leave the blow to me, but stand ready to grasp the fellow by the throat, and remember that a cry will destroy us."

I made no further remonstrance against the course that Fred had marked out, but I inwardly dreaded to think that it was necessary to shed more human blood for the sake of preserving our lives.

Nearer and nearer did the bushranger draw, and we could hear him mutter an oath at the difficult task that was assigned him. By the direction of the sound, we calculated that he would land directly in front of us; and we were not mistaken, for he jumped to clear the shelf under which we were hid, and when he struck the earth, it was within a foot of us.

Before he discovered us — for his back was towards me — I flew at him, grasped him firmly around the throat, and then fell backwards, drawing my prisoner with me. He struggled desperately for a moment, but I saw a knife gleam before my eyes, and I felt a convulsive shudder run through the frame of my prisoner, and then his resistance ceased.

I rolled him from me, and allowed the body to remain face down. I could not encounter the ghastly face of the dead. It seemed to me like murder.

Fred noticed the expression of my face, and must have surmised my feelings, for he grasped my arm, and whispered hoarsely, —

"Remember that it is to save our own lives, and the life of Mr. Brown, that we resort to the knife. I would give all the gold that I am worth, or hope to get, for a chance to escape such a massacre, but it is impossible. Another victim will descend, and he must share his fate, and then ——"

He ceased speaking, for just then a voice called out, and wanted to know where their companion, who had descended to get the horses, was.

"You, Jim," called out the fellow who appeared to be in authority.

Of course there was no response.

"D—— him, he has gone to sleep, I'll bet a nugget. Go down, Sam, and wake him with a kick of your boots."

The man addressed as Sam grumbled some at the order, but we could hear that he was obeying the command, for the dirt rolled down the bank and fell at our feet, and the oaths and exclamations uttered by the gang hurried him in his descent.

"The same operation is to be repeated," Fred whispered; "use all of your strength, for this fellow is a dangerous customer, I'm convinced."

He had hardly finished speaking, when a stout, burly fellow slid down in front of us, and as he did so, he got a glimpse of our forms.

He was about to utter an exclamation, when my hands were around his throat, compressing his windpipe with a strength that seemed marvellous to me. There was a slight struggle, unseen from the top of the bank, owing to the friendly shelf, and then I saw Fred make a motion with his arm, and almost immediately I felt that I held a corpse in my hands.

I let the body fall to the ground, and as I did so, Fred tore the slouched hat from the wretch's head, placed it upon his own, and then thrusting his head out so that those upon the bank could see the hat, but not my friend's face, and assuming, as nearly as possible, the voice of the dead, shouted:—

"Ah, Bill, come down here and see what we've got."

"Hullo!" cried Bill, "what's up? can't you tell? D—— me if I don't believe they have found a gold mine, down there. Let's go and see, boys."

"Now is our time," cried Fred, quietly removing the pistols which the dead men carried in their belts. "When they have descended half way, we must take them."

We listened attentively, and when we thought that our time had arrived, we stepped out from our place of concealment, and before the bushrangers could overcome their surprise at our sudden appearance, we gave the two nearest the contents of our revolvers.

They relaxed their hold upon the bushes that grew sparsely upon the hill side, and rolling over and over, fell into the ravine, badly wounded.

"Surrender, villains," yelled Fred, in a voice of thunder, pointing his empty pistol at the two remaining robbers — an example that I was not slow to follow. "Make but an attempt to use your weapons, and we'll blow you through and through. Throw down your pistols and knives, and then yield peaceably, or it will be worse for you."

For a moment the villains gazed at us in sullen silence, and then reluctantly complied with our demand. With an imprecation that would sound fearfully in print, the bushrangers commenced their descent, and while they were doing so, we quickly exchanged our empty revolvers for the loaded pistols, and then prepared to receive them with proper attention.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Triumphant Entry into Ballarat, with the Bushrangers.

We did not allow our attention to be drawn from the bushrangers, even for a second, while they were descending, and the scamps knew it, for they cowered, as though expecting to be shot every moment, and one of them muttered something about his being honest, and never engaged in a robbery; while one of the wounded ruffians, who was groaning piteously in the ravine, prayed that his life might be saved, as he had many important revelations to make, which the police would like to hear.

We had taken the precaution to disarm the wounded men, before they fairly recovered from their surprise, so that they were powerless to inflict harm; and after the two bushrangers who were uninjured stood before us, obedient to our will, we began to ask ourselves what we should take to secure them with.

Luckily, upon one of the horses was a halter of considerable length, which we had used when we staked the animals for feeding nights, and we determined to secure them with this, and then carry them to Ballarat in triumph.

Fred stood guard over the ruffians, while I got the rope, and carried our resolution into effect. Bill, the leader of the gang, who was one of the uninjured, uttered a number of angry oaths, as I bound his limbs; but the cocked pistols which Fred held were too much for him to attempt to brave, and he submitted without a struggle.

Even while tying the rope, I used due precautions to prevent their hands from getting at the knots; and although the scamps winced a little, as the cord sunk into their flesh, I did not pay that attention to their comfort that I should, had they been other than bushrangers.

After lashing them together, and then making them lie down upon their backs, from which position they could not move without help, we turned our attention to the two wounded men, who were groaning piteously.

One of them had received a ball near the hip, which had shattered the bones in that region, and prevented his standing upon his feet, even for a second.

The other was wounded in the back, near the spine, and could not move without great exertion. We could not relieve their pains, or even furnish them with a drink of water, for which they begged piteously; but we promised that they should be removed to Ballarat, as soon as possible, and that their wants should there be attended to.

We then led our horses to the spot where the inspector was lying, and was glad to find that he was quite cheerful, in spite of his intense suffering.

We briefly explained to him what we had done, but it was some time before he would really believe that we were giving a true account of our proceedings. It seemed so extraordinary that two men could accom-

plish so much, by the aid of a little strategy, that he was lost in wonder, and declared that to us alone did he owe his life.

"Only wait until I get back to Ballarat and tell the police force that two Americans have saved my life, and refused to leave me, even when their own was in danger, and you shall see the manner in which they will treat you and your countrymen. I'll never complain again that Americans are troublesome at the mines, and if I had the power, not one of them should be called upon for the payment of a tax."

Mr. Brown never forgot us, and even now, I am in the habit of receiving letters from him from Australia, and in each one there is an allusion to the ravine scenes. But I am again getting before my story.

"We have but little time to spare," said Fred; "we must reach Ballarat before sundown, and send out a party to look after the wants of the wounded bushrangers; now, if you think that you can ride to the mines, we will start immediately. Even if the pain of moving is great, let me advise you to endure it, for much depends upon your firmness."

The inspector understood the meaning of Fred's words too well to hesitate about which course he should pursue. He knew that his wounds were dangerous, and that they would mortify in a short time, unless dressed and cleansed; for already a crowd of flies were hovering in the air about his head, and ready to plague his life out, the instant we withdrew a short distance.

"I think that I can ride to Ballarat," the inspector said, after feeling of his leg, and finding that the bleeding had nearly ceased; "at any rate, I cannot remain here through half of the night. Lift me on to one of the horses, and let me see how I can navigate."

We raised him gently in our arms, and placed him in my saddle, and to our great satisfaction, we found that after the first paroxysm of pain was over, he could get along very well. We led the animal upon which he was mounted slowly along the ravine, until we reached our prisoners, who were lying in the same position as when we left them.

Upon the inspector's thinking that it would be better to take the two uninjured men with us, we cut a portion of their bonds, but still allowed their arms to be confined, and after a hasty examination of the wounds of the two bushrangers, we promised them speedy assistance, and then started on our return to Ballarat.

Our prisoners marched in advance of us, in gloomy silence, for a short distance, but I could observe that the leader, or the man who was called "Bill," cast anxious glances at the inspector, as though desirous of speaking, yet fearing that his remarks would not be received with much cordiality. At length he mustered sufficient nerve to exclaim,—

"It is long since we have met, Mr. Brown."

"I know that, Bill; yet you have managed to keep your name alive, so that you see I have not forgotten you."

"I never was a favorite of yours, even while at the hulks," replied the bushranger, with a gloomy scowl.

"It was your own fault, Bill. I would have treated you in the manner that the others were treated, had you but given me the chance. Was not your conduct of the most stubborn and rebellious nature? Did you not endeavor to excite to mutiny the prisoners of your ward,

and when you were detected, how could you hope for mercy at the hands of the prison commissioners?"

"But you flogged me — flogged me until my back was marked and bruised, and even now the scars are visible. You tied me up like a dog; you would not hear me, although I begged with tears for death, rather than have the cat touch my back. I then felt like a man. After the flogging I was a brute, and ready to avenge my wrongs upon all who crossed my path."

The outlaw stopped while delivering his remarks, which were uttered with vehement passion, and we were obliged to compel him to move on, so carried away was he with his subject.

"The flogging which was administered to you caused you to murder a miner and his wife, who were journeying towards Melbourne, rejoiced to think that they were worth a few hundred pounds," continued Mr. Brown, sarcastically.

"It's a lie," muttered the fellow, with a downcast look.

"You know that you murdered both, while sleeping. Coward that you are, you feared to meet the miner awake."

"It's a lie!" returned the fellow, with a glance towards the inspector that would have annihilated him if it had been possible; "I met them when awake, and ——"

He ceased suddenly, and continued to walk forward at a rapid rate.

The inspector glanced at us in a meaning manner, as though desirous that we should remember all that was said.

"Your brother pal, who was with you at the time, and who is now working out a sentence on the roads, tells me that you crept up to the miner and wife, and struck the former first; and that after the deed was completed, you refused to share the gold dust."

"That's another lie!" cried the fellow, stamping his foot with passion; "I gave him his share for silencing the woman, while I dealt with the man. He knows it, and he also knows that he spent the dust in three days at Melbourne, where we were in disguise, and stopped at old mother Holey's."

A gratified expression beamed upon the inspector's face, and I doubt if he remembered the pain with which he was afflicted, for the murder that he had thus suddenly brought to light was one that had puzzled him for a long time, and a reward of two hundred pounds was due to whoever revealed the mystery. He had indulged in a little fiction to make Bill confess the crime, and he had succeeded beyond his utmost expectations.

For a long time after Bill had revealed his knowledge of one of the most brutal murders that ever occurred in Australia, our prisoner refused to talk, although Mr. Brown provoked him to reveal other matters that he was anxious of knowing.

The bushranger appeared to recollect that in a moment of passion he had disclosed more than he should have done, and therefore refused to converse; but at length Mr. Brown led him to talk of the days when he was a prisoner at the hulks, and when the inspector was an overseer or turnkey at the same institution.

"How many years have passed, Bill, since you crossed the water?"

inquired the inspector; meaning, in a polite way, to find out the exact time he had been transported.

"It's over six, I think; let me see; it's two years next month since I left my quarters at the hulks and started in search of fortune, and at times a hard one it has been," returned the prisoner.

"I've no doubt of it. Had you but remained faithful and obedient, your time would have nearly expired, now, I think," continued the inspector, in a friendly tone; but I could see that he was only leading the bushranger along for the purpose of extracting information.

"Yes," replied the fellow, bitterly, "my time would have arrived, and I would have been discharged from the accursed hulks, but not by human hands. Death would have claimed me long before this; and death would have been preferable to the life that I led."

"But there were others who were confined with more serious charges against them than yourself, and yet you know that many of them were pardoned, or obtained tickets of leave, and are now doing well."

"Yes, because they became slaves to your will, and played the spy upon those who dared to remonstrate against the food and the treatment which they received. I was one of their victims, and well I paid for my independence."

"You did, indeed," muttered the inspector, but Bill did not hear him.

"I went to the hulks determined to serve out my time like a man; but a few weeks' residence convinced me that, unless I became a slave, and trembled at the officer's nod, I should be broken in body and spirit. Then I laid my plans for an insurrection of the convicts, and had I not trusted to your minion, Ned, you would not have been driving me to certain death at the present time."

"Well, what would you have done?" asked the inspector, quietly.

"There were eight hundred of us, all desperate men, and reckless of life. We should have murdered our officers, and then, before an alarm could have reached the soldiers, we should have attacked their quarters, and those who would not have joined us must have perished without mercy. Afterwards we intended to sack Melbourne, collect all the gold that we could, and seek for asylums upon some of the islands in the broad Pacific. Such was our programme, and it would not have failed, I am convinced; but your spies destroyed our hopes, and brought me to punishment and shame."

The bushranger strode on as though he was at the head of an army, and his dark features were lighted up at the thought of the carnage which he and his companions intended to inflict.

"Your plot could not have succeeded," the inspector said, after a moment's pause, "because every citizen in Melbourne would have armed himself, and hunted you to the death. But we will not discuss the subject. You failed in your design, and were punished as you deserved to be. Were I in the same position that I then held, and should another attempt be made to revolt, I should recommend, not the lash, but death to all who were engaged."

"Better death a hundred times, than a hundred lashes," cried the bushranger, with a fearful oath. "But I have revenged myself for the flogging, and for every lash I have made some one pay dear."

"Bah! that is all talk!" cried the inspector, in a careless way; but I saw that he was trembling with anxiety to learn a correct history of the prisoner's outrages.

"Is it all talk?" repeated Bill, with a sneer. "It was talk, I suppose, when we robbed the escort of thirty thousand pounds. It was talk, I suppose, when we picked off six of the soldiers, and drove the rest, like frightened curs, from the treasure. It is talk, when I tell you that we have been in the vicinity of Ballarat for two months past, and have watched for you night and day, and never got a chance to strike until to-day. Talk, is it? Well, we have talked to some purpose, and even if I am a prisoner, I feel satisfied."

"But you could not have spent your share of the plunder," said Mr. Brown, in a soothing, conciliating tone.

The bushranger stopped, and looked full in the face of the inspector, and a glow of triumph overspread his face as he answered, —

"I understand your question, but it will not do. When I die, I carry all knowledge of the place where the dust is buried to the grave, and you shall never see a grain of it. I have you there, and will enjoy my triumph."

"But perhaps a disclosure may obtain your pardon; and surely, for your life you would give up the gold," the inspector said, still maintaining a cheerful deportment.

"The trick is stale, and will not answer," the ruffian returned, with a hoarse laugh; "you may load me with chains, and starve me to death, but I'll never divulge the secret!"

As though he did not wish to converse further upon the subject, the bushranger turned his back upon us, and maintained a stoical silence until we reached Ballarat.

"I have overcome more remonstrance than you will offer, my friend," the inspector muttered, in a low tone; "the gold that you have buried shall yet be brought to light."

"Were you in earnest in promising a pardon?" I asked of Mr. Brown.

"In promising, yes; in expecting to get it granted, I tell you frankly, no. We have to resort to many ways to accomplish our ends, and promises work well; and why should we scruple to use them? The gold that fellow has buried somewhere near here will help enrich three honest men — meaning us — and would it not be a shame to let the fellow die without divulging?"

"But I supposed that property recovered from bushrangers went to government, unless the rightful owners claimed it."

"So it does, when the owner can prove that the gold dust belongs to him. Rather a difficult thing, you will imagine; and to prevent dispute, we generally take care of it. Depend upon it, that fellow will make a confession to me, a few days before his execution, and with the hope of receiving a pardon. After his death, I shall know whether he has lied or not. If he sticks to the truth, as one would naturally suppose he would, just before his death, we may calculate upon having done a good day's work."

We contrasted the inspector's idea of right and wrong with Murden's, his brother officer, and found that there was but little difference between

them. Both were determined to make money when it was possible, and were, sometimes, not overscrupulous in their transactions.

It was the effect of a system which belonged exclusively to Australia, and the jealousy of a government that did not recognize talent unless backed by influence. The police were not looked upon as men of character and trust; and they retaliated by making money as fast as possible, so that they could leave the force, and enter into business more in accordance with the feelings of gentlemen.

We hinted to the inspector our opinion, and he frankly acknowledged that such was the case, but he offered a plea in extenuation.

Mr. Brown had become so interested in his subject that his bodily pains were forgotten. We should have been willing to have listened to him for hours, for his remarks showed a good knowledge of the country, and what it required to make it great and prosperous; but we were close to Ballarat, and issuing from the town we saw a squad of mounted police, who quickened their pace when they saw us.

"I will wager an ounce of gold that my men have become alarmed at my prolonged absence, and are just starting in search of me," said the inspector.

The surmise was correct, for Mr. Brown had left word that he should be back by noon, and it was now past three o'clock.

The guard of police looked surprised when they saw their chief, who certainly appeared somewhat the worse for his trip; but their discipline was too good to permit them to ask questions, although I could see that they were anxious to.

"I have met with a slight accident, men," Mr. Brown said, after exchanging a word with the sergeant of the corps, "and to these two gentlemen am I indebted for my life. Look at them well, and remember that they are my friends for life, and if you can ever benefit them in any way, you are to do it. They are Americans, and strangers in Ballarat, and must be protected in their business if every other firm is ruined.

"Jackson," the inspector said, "get a team, and take six men with you, and proceed immediately to 'Snake Paradise.' In the ravine you will find two wounded and two dead bushrangers. Bury the latter, and bring the former to the prison, where their injuries can be attended to. Lose no time, but start immediately."

The corporal addressed as Jackson stopped only long enough to detail six men, when he started towards the town at a brisk gallop, which raised a cloud of dust that resembled a fog bank.

"Two of you take these fellows to prison and double iron them, and tell old Warner that he had better look after them sharp, for they are bushrangers of some notoriety."

"And tell your keeper that I have escaped from more secure jails than the one in Ballarat, and that Bill Swinton still possesses the pluck of a man."

"That will do," returned the inspector, dryly, after the bushranger had finished. "Take him away, and to pay him for that speech, tell Warner to put a ring around his waist, in addition to the double irons."

"I still hope for the time when I can meet you alone, and when no interfering Yankees will save you from my vengeance. Bill Swinton is worth a dozen dead men, and woe ——"

The remainder of the man's remarks was lost, for the police hurried him off with his companion, who appeared to be completely broken in spirit.

"Now, Sam, give this gentleman (pointing to Fred, who had walked nearly all the distance from the ravine) your horse, for I am mounted on his."

The man relinquished his animal without a word, and we rode towards the town, followed at a short distance by the squad of policemen. As we passed along the main thoroughfare of Ballarat, a crowd of people assembled to greet us, for already the news had circulated extensively that a large gang of bushrangers had been broken up through our instrumentality; and the miners were rejoiced at the intelligence, for they were more interested than any other class of people in freeing the country of robbers, so that escorts of gold dust could pass to the large cities without molestation. Under these circumstances the police were cheered, and that was something that had not occurred since the struggle between the government and the miners had commenced regarding the mining tax.

"You see how much we are indebted to you," remarked the inspector, with a grim smile, as we helped him from his horse upon reaching his quarters. "To-morrow the knaves would cheer just as lustily if we were driven from the town. Good by — don't fail to come and see me early to-morrow morning."

And with these parting words we turned our horses' heads and started for our store, where we found Rover keeping guard, and every thing safe. Tired with our day's jaunt, we resisted several pressing invitations to attend the indignation meeting that was to be holden that evening by the miners, and went to bed early.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Thrashing a Bully.

We slept long past our usual hour for rising, and were awakened by the violent baying of Rover, and loud shouts of "Kill him! kill him!"

The cries were near our premises, and we lost no time in throwing on our clothes and seeking to investigate the matter. A crowd of people were hurrying towards the banks of the river, or rather what was a river in the wet season, for at the present time there was not water enough in its bed to quench the thirst of a bird, and we joined them without delay.

"What is the matter?" I asked of one excited individual, who appeared more anxious to get in at the death than his companions.

"Darned if I know. I heard the cry of 'Kill him,' and I suppose somebody has been stealing something. Don't bother me with questions, for I want to be in at the death."

Another wild shout from the crowd in front hastened our movements, and Fred and myself threw ourselves into the excited mass, and strove to gain a place where we could afford some help to the thief, in case the confusion was occasioned by one. By struggling desperately we managed to get into the centre of the crowd, and saw that a young man was in the custody of two miners, and that they were disposed to take summary vengeance upon the fellow for the alleged crime of stealing their dust, which they had concealed in their tent. All this was told to us in the space of a few seconds' time, and meanwhile the air was filled with cries of "Kill him," "Lynch him," "Hang him," "Let's stone him to death," &c.

The young fellow was terribly frightened, and was begging for mercy in the most piteous tones, and appealing to those by whom he was surrounded to save him, for he was innocent of the crime, and never stole a dollar in his life. There was something in the lad's face that convinced me that he spoke the truth, yet we did not like to interfere and get the wrath of the ruffians turned upon ourselves, and yet we did not care to stand idly by and witness the ill-treatment of a boy, who seemed unused to the rough scenes of the mines. Each of his captors had a hand upon his collar, and even during the excitement I could not help contrasting the fineness of his skin with the horny, leather-colored skin of his accusers.

"So help me Heaven, gentlemen, I never stole any thing in my life," cried the lad; and his voice was soft, and so different from those by whom he was surrounded, I was convinced he belonged to some aristocratic family, and had strayed to Australia in search of fortune, perhaps to help sustain his sinking house.

"You lie, you young whelp; you know you lie," cried one of the miners, shaking the boy by the collar so roughly that I was fearful he would dislocate his bones.

"I do not lie, gentlemen; upon my honor, I do not. Don't choke me so hard — you hurt me," cried the boy, putting a small hand upon the miner's rough paws, as though his slight strength was likely to effect any thing in the way of obtaining a cessation of their cruelty.

"I've had my eye on you for some time," cried one of the men, "and I knew I should get hold of you at last. What was you doing in our tent when we woke up this morning? Answer me that, will you?"

Between them both they shook the boy so roughly that he burst into tears, and was incapable of uttering a word. This, instead of exciting feelings of compassion in the breasts of the miners, caused them to shout with sardonic laughter, and mock him by sobbing in imitation. It was during the latter performance that Fred, followed by myself, squeezed into the small circle and confronted the two half-civilized brutes.

"Don't hurt the lad," cried Fred, in a mild tone. "He is nothing but a boy, and if he did take your dust perhaps he can make some explanation that will satisfy you."

"Hullo," ejaculated one of the fellows, with a stare, "who in the devil are you, I should like to know?"

"That is of no consequence, at present," replied Fred, in a tone of excessive mildness. "The question is regarding this boy. I think

there must be some mistake in your accusations, and if you will give him into my charge I will make up to you all that he has taken, provided you can prove that you have lost any thing."

"Hullo, boys, here's a couple of the young thief's pals. Down with 'em both."

We had expected such a cry, and knew how to meet it. Instead, therefore, of looking frightened, and attempting to escape from the circle, we remained perfectly cool and self-possessed, and those who had pressed forward to lay hands upon us drew back and awaited further developments.

The youngster, who was still retained by the two miners, had, upon our first interference in his behalf, trembled with hope; but when he heard the savage cries, his heart seemed to sink within him, and he appeared as though about to faint.

"You are choking the lad to death," cried Fred. "Don't you see that he can hardly breathe? Let me take charge of him until the police call for him."

"Do you suppose that we are fools?" replied one of the men, who was disposed to be more obstinate than his companions. We knows rogues when we sees 'em."

"Then it's probable you know your own face when you consult a looking-glass," Fred said; and the bitter taunt told well with the crowd, for they roared with laughter, and appeared to be changing their views regarding the guilt of the lad.

The ruffian looked at us for a moment, as though almost determined to rush upon us and try his strength in an encounter; but our coolness confounded him, and he hesitated, and appeared to seek counsel by looking upon the numerous faces by which he was surrounded.

"You ain't a-going to let a couple of bushrangers abuse honest miners who pays their taxes, and only axes for what is right, is you?" the fellow said.

"No, no; you shan't be hurt, Tom," a number of the crowd said, the epithet of bushranger being sufficient to excite the worst prejudices of the miners; and we saw that already a number of lowering brows were bent upon us, and that but a few words were required to cause the whole pack to yelp in concert.

Tom saw his advantage, and was quick to follow it up with another blow.

"I knows that this little devil [giving his prisoner a shake] is in league with these fellows, and that they sent him into town for the purpose of robbing us honest miners, and they intended to wait outside until he returned. He didn't jine 'em, and now they want to get him out of our hands so that they can all make their escape. Let's lynch all three."

"Lynch 'em! Lynch 'em!" were the cries, and the crowd pressed towards us to carry into effect the words.

Fred's hand involuntarily sought his revolver, but I restrained him.

"No firearms," I whispered; "if we shed a drop of their blood we are doomed men. Keep cool, and trust to chance."

"Miners of Ballarat, will you hear me?" I shouted, determined to

make one more appeal to them, and then try the virtues of a revolver, for I did not wish to die unavenged.

"No, no; we've heard enough! Down with the bushrangers!" cried Tom, yelling with exultation, and the crowd took up the cry and reëchoed it.

"I have a proposition to make," cried Fred, and his loud voice was heard above the tumult, and curiosity outweighed the thirst for vengeance.

"What's the proposition? spit it out!" shouted the crowd; "will you come down liberal with stolen property?"

There was a general roar of laughter at this sally, and when it had died away, Fred said, —

"This man [pointing to Tom] says that we are bushrangers, which we deny, and can prove that we are honest miners, like yourselves. [Sensation.] We do not propose to bandy words with him, because he is a contemptible coward, and dare not impose upon any one but a little boy. That is not characteristic of the miners of Ballarat, for long before we reached this part of the country, we were told they were foes to tyranny. [Faint indications of applause.] We tell the man who called us bushrangers that he is a liar, and that we require satisfaction, or an abject apology from him for the insult."

There were cries and yells of —

"That's right — go in, old fellow — a ring, a ring — let 'em fight — he's a brick, ain't he?" &c.

Tom turned slightly pale, and seemed confused with the way that the affair was likely to work. The crowd saw it, and were the more strenuous for the acceptance of Fred's proposition.

"You see, gentlemen," my friend exclaimed, "the man who calls himself a miner of Ballarat is nothing but a coward. He never worked in a shaft, or dug an ounce of gold in his life. He is nothing but a 'packer,' and dare not face a man; but can beat boys and natives, because he knows they cannot resist him."

"Let him fight, or we'll lynch him," yelled the crowd; and thousands, who a few minutes before were ready to crush us beneath their feet, suddenly arrayed themselves on our side, and pressed towards the miner with scornful looks.

"I'll fight the feller," Tom said, after a few minutes' silence, "but it shall be in the old English style, stand up and knock down. I'll have no pistols, 'cos I never used 'em, and don't think I could hit a man, any how."

"A fight, a fight! form a ring!" and the proposition for a combat *a la fistiana* was received with joy by every Englishman present.

"O, don't, sir," exclaimed the youth who had been the cause of the trouble; "don't expose yourself on my account."

"Don't be alarmed," returned Fred; "I'd fight a dozen men, sooner than one hair of your head should be touched."

"Remember," Fred continued, turning to the crowd, "that if I come off best in the fight, the boy goes with me."

"Yes, yes; we understand the conditions of the fight. Form a ring; stand back there;" and the crowd shouted, and swayed to and fro, and during the tumult we saw a sturdy fellow struggling towards us, as though to get a front view. The man, whose face I thought I had

seen before, was not deterred by slight obstaeles, and by dint of using his elbows vigorously, and treading on his neighbors' corns, he soon got within a few feet of us.

"And it's sitting him a-fighting, is it, ye spalpeens?" eried the fellow, with a Hibernian aceent that was not to be mistaken; and he looked around the crowd, as though he wished some one would pick a quarrel with him, for the sake of variety.

"And it's bushrangers ye think they is, do ye?" the Irishman continued, seornfully; "do ye think ye would know a thafe if ye seed one? Can't ye tell a rale gintleman from a snaking blaekguard?"

"What is the matter, Pat?" the miners asked, good-naturedly, most of those present appearing to know our new defender.

"Matter, is it?" he repeated, scornfully; "I tells ye that if a hair of these two gintlemen's is hurted, I'll liek the whole of ye, blackguards that ye is."

A roar of laughter followed this speech, whieh excited the Irishman's indignation to its fullest extent.

"Ye laugh, do ye? It's little ye would laugh if ye saw these two gintlemen dressing the cuts and sores of poor miners who had divil a ha'penny to pay the doetor with. It's little ye would laugh if ye had seed this gintleman standing up and having a craek at old Pete Burley, the bully of Ballarat; and by me faith, he brought him down in less time than ye can descend a shaft with the crank broken."

The allusion to the expeditious manner in whieh miners sometimes went down a shaft, much against their will, and at a great loss to their personal dignity, was received with rounds of laughter.

"You know these men, then?" cried a fellow who had been remarkably offieious during the disturbanee.

"Men, are they?" eried our indignant champion, and he raised one of his huge fists and dropped it with full force upon the head of the speaker, and down he went, as though shot.

"Call them gintlemen, hereafter, or by the powers, I *strike* ye, the next time I *hit* ye."

There was another good-natured laugh at the expense of the fallen man, and at the Irishman's wit.

"Are these the two Americans who have reeently arrived, and who were eoneerned in that duel with Burley?"

"Of eoorse they is; and haven't they been giving a number of us poor divils medicine and good adviee? O, by the powers, let me say the man that wants to hurt 'em, that's all!"

This announeement completely ehanged the feelings of the crowd, and the miners pressed forward, shook our hands in the most friendly manner, and we supposed that our trouble was over; but Tom was not disposed to give up his prisoner in that manner, and perhaps he was the more strongly inclined for a battle, beeause Fred's weight was mueh less than his own, and therefore he imagined that he would have things his own way at a game of fistieuffs.

"I am glad that the stranger is not a bushranger," Tom said, "but he must not expeet to make laws for us poor miners. When we have dust stolen from us, we have a right to deal with the thief, and I shall elaim my privilege."

"That is only just," murmured the miners.

"I have already offered to pay you for all that the boy has stolen," Fred said, "but if that does not suit you, deliver him up to the police, and let him have an examination."

"I shan't do any thing of the kind. I caught him in my tent stealing gold dust, and I shall deal with him in the regular way; I shall give him two dozen lashes across his back, and then let him run."

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed the lad, clasping his hands imploringly, and endeavoring to throw himself at the feet of his captors. "Do not beat me, for Heaven's sake, for I am a ——"

The rest of the boy's remarks were lost in the confusion which his outburst of grief occasioned, yet no one seemed disposed to interfere with the regular course of things, as the miner had custom to sustain him in his conduct.

"I'll stand by my bargain," the brute said, with a grim smile; "if the gentleman wants you, he can have you on the terms that he offered — a regular Englishman's battle, and fair play to all."

"Your proposition is accepted," cried Fred, turning to Tom, who did not receive the notice with that alacrity which we expected.

Fred threw off his jacket, and that was the signal for the formation of a ring some thirty feet wide in the centre; but the desperate struggles which were made to get within sight and hearing prevented the space from being very regular, and the ring from being very round.

The miner leisurely stripped off his superfluous clothing, and his form was large enough to strike terror into the hearts of those who had not made the art of self-defence a study for years, as I well knew that Fred had. The man's arms were brawny and muscular, and longer than Fred's, and when the two men took their positions, I confess that I had some fear for the safety of my friend. But if I looked fearful Fred did not, and no one could have traced upon his face the least emotion or sign of dismay.

But with all the ruffian's physical force, he looked far from confident, and I have no doubt that if he had possessed a sufficient excuse, he would have quitted the ring, and acknowledged the defeat without a struggle.

The Irishman and myself were Fred's seconds, and the miner who helped Tom hold the boy was obliged to relinquish his prize, and assist his friend, no one else volunteering.

For a few minutes after the men were placed, each stood upon the defensive, and waited for hostilities. It was no part of Fred's plan to begin the battle, as he wanted to discover whether Tom possessed science, as well as vast strength; and he was not in this respect kept long in suspense, for the miner advanced towards him, swinging his long arms and huge fists in the most ridiculous manner, and which caused the Irishman to shout, —

"Make way for the windmill, there."

A roar of laughter greeted the Irishman's sally, which caused Tom some confusion, and before he could recover from his bewilderment, Fred had sprang within his reach, and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling to the extremity of the ring, where he fell heavily upon the ground.

"The windmill goes stern fust, and no mistake. Holy St. Patrick! but isn't he groggy?"

The slang term groggy was well understood by those present, and when Tom gained his feet, he was saluted with another roar of laughter, that made him foam with rage.

He rushed towards Fred like a mad bull, and had he caught him in his arms, Fred would have fared none too well, for a time. But my friend darted one side, and as his adversary rushed past, he delivered another blow in the vicinity of the man's right ear, that stopped his headlong career, and he dropped to mother earth once more, baffled, bewildered, and discouraged.

"Hullo! Fighting here?" shouted a voice, and half-a-dozen policemen rushed into the ring, and pounced upon Fred and Tom before a third blow could be struck.

The assembled miners did not dare to interfere, for fear their licenses would be forfeited by the government commissioner. Therefore no murmuring was heard.

"Prize fighting, hey?" cried the sergeant of the force. "Away with them to the prison."

"Had you not better investigate first, Mr. Sergeant," I said, touching his arm.

He looked me full in the face, and I recognized the man as one whom we had met the day before, upon our return from Snakes' Paradise. His bold, confident air instantly deserted him, and he was as civil as I could desire.

"O, I beg your pardon, sir — I did not see you before," he said, touching his cap, with a military salute. "What can I do to serve you, sir?"

"You have my friend in custody. Of course, you recollect all the instructions of the inspector."

"To be sure I do, sir. I think that there must be some mistake here, and will instantly set him at liberty; but the miner who has dared to strike him shall be punished."

"That is unnecessary, as he has already been handled rather roughly," I said; and in a few words I explained to the policemen the origin of the affair.

"Ah, yes, I see, you were quite right in what you have done, and I regret that I didn't arrive on the ground before, to have saved you this annoyance. Release that gentleman," the sergeant said, turning to his men. "He is a friend of the inspector's."

The men obeyed without a word in opposition, and the crowd took courage at the sight, and attempted a feeble applause.

"As for you, sir," the sergeant said, turning to the miner, who appeared to be completely cowed by the array of force against him, and who expected nothing less than a sentence of thirty days' hard work on the roads for the part that he had taken in the fight, "you may thank these gentlemen for their forbearance in not urging your punishment, which you certainly deserve. Give the boy in charge of the gentlemen, and, mark me, I shall have an eye on your future habits."

The poor lad, half crazed with delight, shed tears at his deliverance, and declared that he would serve us to the best of his ability; while the

fellows who had used him so harshly sneaked to their tents without uttering a word concerning their reputed robbery.

We thanked the sergeant for his interference, and with the lad walked to our store — but after we were clear of the crowd the boy appeared to be in a reflective mood, and scarcely exchanged a dozen words with us; and even when we told him that he should live with us for the present, and share our hard beds, his gratitude did not appear to be overpowering, and he hung his head as though he was not worthy of so much attention.

CHAPTER XLV.

A Young Girl's Adventures in Search of her Lover.

We speedily prepared a good breakfast, and invited our *protégé* to satisfy his appetite, for he looked hungry and appeared hungry; but to our surprise he manifested some reluctance to eating before us, and not all of our rallying could overcome his diffidence.

"Come, come, take hold and eat heartily," I said, "and don't appear like a young girl in the presence of her beau. Your modesty is all thrown away in the mines of Australia."

"You know me, then?" he asked, in a sad tone, and his head was bent low to hide his blushes, which covered his face like a thick coating of rouge.

"Know you? not we; but that is what we are anxious about, and after breakfast you must tell us what freak drove you to this country, and how it happened that you were in Tom's tent at such an early hour in the morning."

"I was weary," he said, making a desperate effort to appear at his ease, "and having no money, I thought that I would rest myself where I should not be called upon to pay for lodgings. When I first went there the tent was unoccupied; but when I awoke, I found that the men had returned while I was asleep, and then they accused me of stealing their gold dust, and would have beaten me had you not interfered."

"I have no doubt of that, my lad," I answered, "and I see that they used you rather roughly, at any rate. One of the brutes has knocked off a piece of skin from your neck."

"You had better have a little salve rubbed upon your bruises, for wounds in this country have to be attended to without delay," Fred said.

I went to my trunk and got all the healing ointment that we possessed, and offered it for his use — but he firmly declined, and declared that he did not suffer from the effect of his bruises, and that they would soon be well. I turned away disappointed, and inclined to be angry, which the young fellow saw in a moment.

"Don't be cross with me," he said, in such a soft, pleading tone, and he looked into my face with his gentle eyes so full of tears, that all my resentment was banished in a moment.

"I will work for you as hard as my strength will allow, but please don't be cross," the boy repeated; "I am very grateful for what you have done for me, and know that I shall never be able to repay you; but don't be cross, will you?"

"No, no; we will never use a cross word to you," Fred said, laying his hand upon the boy's head and patting his cheek, both of which actions seemed to cause the young fellow excessive alarm. "You may stay here in the store as long as you please, and we will pay you for your labor. When you wish to go, say so, and we will part company without any ill-feeling."

The boy seemed grateful for our kindness, but he did not express it in words; and while he and Fred were talking I rummaged my trunk, and found a number of articles of clothing that were suitable for him, and in which he stood in great need, his garments being somewhat the worse for wear.

"Strip off your stockings and shirt, and put these on," I said, handing him a new pair of socks, and a calico shirt too small for me, but which I thought would answer his purpose.

Again did the tell-tale blood mount in the young fellow's face, and he looked embarrassed and perplexed.

"I would rather not," he said, after a moment's pause, and I saw that he was trembling violently.

"Nonsense — off with your shoes at once," and Fred stooped down to assist him, and in spite of his resistance tore off his ragged stockings, and was about to replace them with mine, when the boy began to cry again.

We looked at his grieved face, suffused with blushes, and then we looked at the naked foot and ankle, and immediately arrived at our conclusions; and, strange to say, they were of wonderful unanimity. We thought the exposed limb was too white to belong to our own sex, and as our eyes met we exclaimed, —

"The devil! A woman!"

"Who would have thought it?" cried Fred, with wonder depicted upon his face.

"Don't cry," I said, addressing the girl in as mild a tone as I could assume; but to my astonishment, the little thing only cried the harder.

"You are a smart man to talk to women," Fred exclaimed, pettishly. "That voice of yours is enough to frighten a female into convulsions, and your face is not very prepossessing, as I suppose you are aware. This is the way you should go to work."

To my surprise, the impudent puppy seated himself by the side of the girl, took one of her unresisting hands in his own, and began to talk to her in such a soothing manner that her tears were dried up, as if by magic; and she actually smiled when he told her how comfortable she could be in a little bedroom which he promised to fit up for her exclusive accommodation, and where no one would intrude upon her moments of privacy.

"Jack," said Fred, suddenly jumping up and laying his hand on my arm, "we must protect this poor girl to the best of our ability."

"I suppose that we must," I returned, with great philosophy.

"She is an innocent little thing," my friend added, in a musing tone.

"Is she?" I asked; "pray, how do you happen to know?"

"O, because she is constantly blushing and crying," Fred answered, boldly.

"Is that the only method by which you judge?" I asked, quite lost in admiration at his perceptible powers.

"Of course it is — innocence always blushes."

Let ladies take note that in the estimate of some men a blush is regarded with more veneration than a hundred protestations of purity. Where my friend obtained his knowledge of women I am unable to say, for he was never married, although many times in love.

"What is she doing here at the mines?" I inquired.

"That I have not found out as yet, but I will interrogate her on the subject," replied Fred, with much confidence.

He began his examination in such a delicate manner that the girl grew more and more communicative, and revealed her history, which was not a common one.

Her name was Mary Ann Purcel, and she was the daughter of a respectable cordwainer of London. Her father, as usual with men of his kind of business, had taken an apprentice to learn his profession, but it seems that the young fellow had studied the beauty of the girl more than his duties, which gave greater satisfaction to the lady than the parent, and a quarrel ensued; and Robert Herrets' (the name of the apprentice) indentures were broken or given up, and the young fellow was told that he had better seek his fortune in some other quarter of the globe, or at least attempt some other business besides that of being a cordwainer.

The lover did not relish the summary manner that his claims were disposed of, and so intimated; but he was ridiculed for seeking to ally himself with a man who could afford to give his daughter five hundred pounds on her wedding day, and yet keep up his business.

Robert, like all lovers, did not despair of yet claiming the girl as his wife, and to Mary he made known his plans. She was to remain single for three years, and to await his orders, while he tried to push his fortune in the mines of Australia; for they had just been opened to the world, and thousands were leaving the shores of England to suffer hardships, privations, and perhaps death, to collect a portion of the dross. The girl readily consented to any terms that he offered, and with tearful eyes kissed her lover, and wished him God speed on his long journey of thousands of miles across the salt ocean.

He arrived at Melbourne safe and well; and to convince us that her story was true she pulled from her bosom half a dozen letters written by Robert after he had reached the island. In his first he told her of his stormy passage, and the bad food that he had been compelled to eat to save himself from starvation; but he was confident and hopeful, and told her to remember her promise of being his wife, and that if he should succeed in making money he would send for her, and that they could be married the day of her arrival. The next letter was dated at Ballarat, where the lover had proceeded as soon as possible, and where he was hard at work sinking a shaft, with great hope of taking out gold by the pound.

The third letter was still more encouraging, for he had cleared in

three months three hundred pounds above his expenses, and yet he wrote that he had not reached the richest part of the earth which he was mining. The fourth letter was an urgent appeal for the lady to come to him without delay, and he would send a draft to pay her expenses.

At this stage of the correspondence the father of the lady died, and upon an investigation of his affairs it was found that he was insolvent long before his death. Creditors seized upon every thing, and the matter preyed upon the mother in such a manner that she, too, died within two months after her husband. The poor girl was nearly distracted with grief, and for a long time knew not which way to turn, or whom to confide in; and during all her troubles another letter from Australia reached her, upbraiding her for her infidelity, because she had not written as often as Robert had desired, and because she had not joined him. The poor girl hesitated no longer. Only a portion of the money which she had received from the draft was left; but with this she paid for a steerage passage to Melbourne, arrived there safe, and with barely sufficient funds to pay her board for a week. She made a number of inquiries for Robert, but received slight attention at the hands of those whom she interrogated, for at Melbourne steerage passengers are not looked upon with that degree of reverence and respect vouchsafed to those who arrive at our seaports. Besides, there are too many women sent from the old country, for various misdemeanors, to inspire the Australians with much confidence that the stories which are told are all true.

After submitting to numerous insults, for the girl's face was handsome, and her form was good, (who ever heard of a girl with a very plain face being insulted?) and after shedding more tears than a man's neck is worth, the poor thing, to escape persecution and insult, resolved to disguise herself in boy's clothes, cut off her long hair, and then make the best of her way to Ballarat, and see if she could not find the man who had cost her so many hardships. She carried her design into effect, and then spent the last piece of coin that she possessed to pay her passage to Ballarat.

Undiscovered, unsuspected, the girl entered Ballarat at a late hour in the night, and was then told to seek for lodgings wherever she pleased; and, half-dead with fatigue, she strayed about the town, not daring to ask a question of the fierce-looking men whom she chanced to meet reeling towards their tents after a drinking bout at one of the numerous saloons with which Ballarat was cursed.

At length she became so completely exhausted that she could no longer stand, and thinking that a tent which she saw was unoccupied, she entered it and lay down in one corner. Sleep speedily made her forget all of her miseries, and when she awoke she was arrested by the two miners, who had staggered home drunk during the night, and thrown themselves upon their beds not knowing that she was present.

While the ruffians were discussing what punishment should be meted out to her, the girl eluded their vigilance and fled, not knowing or caring where her footsteps led her, as long as she escaped from their horrid threats and obscene jests. The miners pursued with fierce oaths and bitter imprecations, and the road, luckily for Mary, led near our door, and as hundreds joined in pursuit, and all raised the yells which had

awakened us, we were enabled to go to her rescue, and perhaps saved her from a life or death of shame.

Such was the poor girl's story, told with a simplicity that carried conviction to our hearts, and strengthened our resolution to protect and serve her to the extent of our ability.

"You will have to remain with us for a few days," Fred said, after Mary had concluded her history, "and during that time we think that it is far better you should maintain your incognito, and appear as you seem — a boy."

"I have a trunk containing female apparel on the cart that brought me here," she said; as though she had much rather be dressed in the habiliments of her own sex.

"There are numerous reasons why you should maintain your present attire, but I will not wound your delicacy by repeating them," Fred said. "The people of Ballarat are censorious, and we must give them no groundwork for remarks," he continued.

The girl hung her head, but seemed to appreciate the advice and delicacy of Fred. She made no response.

"If the person you are in search of — Mr. Robert Herrets — is to be found in the mines of Ballarat, you shall see him before this time to-morrow; and even after he has joined you, I should recommend that you impose upon the good miners here, and not let them think that the person we have rescued and the newly-made bride is one and the same person."

The girl looked into Fred's face with an earnest gaze, as though she would rather have heard some one else mention the idea of marriage, but my friend did not appear to notice it.

"He will, of course, be rejoiced to meet you, and will sympathize with you in your troubles; and after your union you will forget your new friends."

If Fred had but seen the expressive look that the girl gave him, and then noted the painful thoughts that appeared to have crossed her mind, he would not have continued in that strain.

"I can readily imagine the joy that Mr. Herrets will feel when he knows that, for the purpose of becoming his wife, you have braved the dangers of the ocean, and struggled nobly against a thousand obstacles, and overcome them all. He will appreciate your love the more, or he will not be human."

She appeared to listen without the power of speech. I suspected the cause of her emotion, but did not dare to hint to Fred my suspicions. I wondered how it would end, and trembled for the fate of the girl if she should continue to nourish the passion that I saw she entertained for my friend. It was marvellous, and almost beyond belief. She had known Fred but a few hours, and yet already was she inspired with a feeling of love for the man, that threatened to annihilate all traces of her passion for the apprentice. I hardly believed it possible, and yet I knew that I could not be mistaken. Fred seemed blind not to perceive it.

"We will go to the police office, and request that diligent search be made for Mr. Herrets," Fred said, and he motioned to go; but the girl murmured something in a low tone, and he stopped.

"You made some request?" he asked.

"I only said that — that perhaps — you were tired, and therefore had — had better rest — before proceeding to the — police."

She tried to look indifferent, but the effort was a failure.

"O, bless your heart, not at all," answered Fred, cheerily; "we will go at once, and you can read a few books that we own until we come back. Rover will take care of you."

The hound stretched himself in the doorway, and showed his teeth as though he understood the order, and was prepared to obey without demurring.

I saw a slight frown gather upon the brow of the girl, and I read her thoughts in a moment. She was asking herself if she would not have possessed more power had she been dressed in female apparel and had never sacrificed her hair. She passed her hand over her short locks two or three times, and a sigh escaped her at the ravage which the scissors had effected.

"Let us go," I said; and I urged my friend from a sight more dangerous to him than a thousand pyramids of black snakes, and yet he was unconscious of fear.

We directed our steps towards the residence of Mr. Brown, the inspector, and were readily admitted to his presence. He was stretched upon his bed, but was slowly recovering from the effect of his bruises, and was quite cheerful over his bodily injuries.

He extended such a welcome to us as gratified our pride, yet did not make us feel as though we were overpraised. We soon laid our business before him, and he ordered a book containing a list of the tax-paying miners of Ballarat to be brought, and which he consulted, for a few minutes, in silence.

"There is no such name as Robert Herrets in the book, but there is a Robert Henrets, and that may be the person you are in pursuit of. I will ask if any of my men know the latter."

He touched a bell, and the policeman who was on duty at the door entered.

"James," inquired the inspector, "do you know a miner here named Robert Henrets?"

"Yes, sir; young fellow — sandy hair — blue eyes — scar over the left one — saves his money — is doing well — never heard that he was a suspicious character," answered the officer, promptly.

"Pshaw!" returned Mr. Brown, pettishly; "you think that every person I ask about is a rogue; you are mistaken. Show these gentlemen to the shaft that Henrets is sinking, or the mine that he is working, and attend to their orders."

"Yes, sir; I know where he is; works the old 'Dugget mine;' smart lad — makes money — pays his tax regular, and never growls 'cos he has to."

"Then he is the only one at the mines," returned the inspector, good humoredly, and we took our leave, fearful that he would begin a long discussion on the merits and rights of taxation.

We had to walk about a mile before we reached the "Dugget mine," but our tramp was beguiled in listening to the peculiar conversation of our guide, who jerked out his sentences and words as though he was

firing them at a whole regiment of refractory miners, and wished to make as short work as possible with them.

"You have been at the mines some time," I said, drawing the man into conversation.

"Ever since they were opened — one of the first police officers here — hard times for grub, then, let me tell you; used to eat leather, or any thing soft; horses all died for the want of water; gold plenty — miners died with overwork — few people here, then — civil — treated the police well, and made us presents. Used to dig myself, sometimes — didn't like it, though — hard work, very — by and by a lot of d——d furreners came here —got drunk and made rows — used to fire pistols at us when we arrested 'em — got hit once, but didn't hurt me much — the fellow gave me ten pounds to settle the matter — he was a Yankee, I think — had a revolver, and used to be desperate when he got drunk — thank God, he died one day, and I saw him buried."

Although the subject was a grave one, we could not refrain from laughing at his summary method of disposing of a sailor who used to be known at Ballarat as "Yankee Jim," and who was a terror to all police officers when he was drunk. He was represented as being as strong as half a dozen ordinary men, of the courage of a lion, and perfectly reckless when under the influence of liquor. Even his boon companions were often obliged to flee for their lives when one of his cross fits came on him; and if he was thwarted in the most trifling particular, his rage was unbounded. He would bite glass and chew it with his teeth, lacerating his gums in a dreadful manner; and it was at one time reported that "Yankee Jim" used to diet on tumblers whenever he felt disposed to grow fleshy.

The fellow was in the United States navy for many years, and ran away from a ship of war that was lying at Sydney when the gold mines were first discovered. The dissipated course that he pursued soon terminated his life, and he died, after a residence of only three months at Ballarat, with delirium tremens.

There were numerous stories told of the sailor, and I was at some pains to investigate the man's history; but beyond that he was called "Yankee Jim," and claimed Cape Cod as his birthplace, found but little to repay me for my trouble; and perhaps a mother is now anxiously expecting a son, whose bones have long since mouldered at Ballarat.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A Marriage, and an Elopement.

In a few minutes we reached the mine. As there was no one in sight, the policeman concluded to give the signal at the entrance of the shaft that the owner was wanted, and as the mine was not very deep, we were not kept waiting any length of time for his appearance. The

tackle for lowering and raising the miners was worked, and first the head and then the body of a man appeared in view.

"Here's two gentlemen — they want to see you, Mr. Henrets," the officer said.

"My name is Herrets," the miner said, "and why you will persist in calling me Henrets is beyond my comprehension."

"One name is as good as the other — what is the difference? — both begin with H and end with s."

We found that the officer's description of the man answered very well. His hair was sandy, his eyes were blue, and his skin was very fair and beardless. He was about five feet six inches, and not very stout.

Dressed as he was, in mining clothes, stained with many a stratum of earth, we could form but a poor opinion of his good looks, even had we been disposed to estimate his beauty before his understanding.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, addressing Fred and myself, in a tone that was intended to be excessively conciliatory.

"Before we answer that question we must ask one," Fred replied. "Were you ever an apprentice to a cordwainer in London?"

The man's face flushed scarlet, and he seemed extremely agitated at the question — but at length he replied, —

"I was an apprentice to a cordwainer, but my indentures were given up before I left England, sir."

"And your master had an only daughter, whose hand you demanded in marriage," Fred continued.

"Yes, but I meant nothing wrong; upon my word, gents, I didn't," he exclaimed, hastily, evidently considering Fred and myself in some way connected with the law, as we were under the guidance of a police officer.

"That remains to be seen," returned Fred, in a mysterious manner, evidently taking some delight in frightening the simple-minded young man all he could.

"O, I can tell you all about it," Herrets exclaimed with eagerness.

"That is unnecessary," Fred replied. "We know all, or nearly all; but what we wish to discover is, why you did not join the lady at Melbourne, as you promised in your letter?"

"Join the lady at Melbourne?" the young fellow repeated, hardly knowing what to say; "why, I wrote to her that if she would come to Australia I would pay her expenses, and marry her, besides. That was fair, wasn't it? But she didn't write me that she would come; so of course I thought that my hundred pounds were a dead loss, and that the girl had got another feller, which I don't call exactly fair; do you?"

We did not commit ourselves by any opinion, as we did not know but that some day it would be brought against us.

We formed an opinion, however, respecting the mental capacity of the youth, for whose sake the poor girl had wandered so many miles; and I no longer wondered that she saw a difference between her lover and Fred.

"Then you received no letter from Miss Purcel, announcing that she would sail on such a day, and requesting you to be on the lookout for her?" asked Fred.

"Of course I didn't," responded the young man, with commendable eagerness. "That is just what I am finding fault with."

"Then you will be rejoiced to learn that, after great suffering and privation, Miss Purcel has arrived, and is in Ballarat," Fred said.

The news almost deprived him of the power of articulation, and for a moment I thought that he would faint, but he didn't. He was too eager to see her, and welcome her to her new home.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Not far distant," Fred answered.

"Take me to her without delay," he cried; "I shall die with joy."

"Softly," replied Fred; "there are some things to be explained before we comply with your request;" and briefly he went over the girl's narrative, as told by herself, until he gave an account of her narrow escape from the hands of the miners who suspected her of stealing their dust.

The lover moaned piteously as he heard the hardships that his mistress had suffered; and after we had persuaded him to change his clothes and remove the stains from his skin, we let him accompany us on our return to the store.

"You must promise us one thing," I said, as we walked along, hardly able to keep up with the lover's impetuous strides, "that you will be married this very day."

I stole a look at Fred's face, but he appeared to approve of the plan, and I could see no traces of disappointment.

If the girl is not obdurate, I thought, I shall save Fred many unhappy days.

"O, I'm willing to agree to that," replied the lover, with a chuckle.

"You have the means to support a wife?" I asked.

"I've got money enough to support her after we are married. I've waited too long for her arrival to waste time with silly delays," he answered, earnestly.

"And you love her well enough to overlook all of her faults, if she has any, and to be a kind, affectionate husband?" asked Fred.

"Of course I do," ejaculated Herrets. "I ain't a particular man, by any means; and if she will only look out for my tent while I am absent, and have my dinner ready when I get home, we shall get along as happy as pigs."

I saw that Fred gave the man a look of intense disgust, and perhaps he also thought what chance of happiness a girl would have with a man who compared his matrimonial life with a pigsty.

"Your intended wife," I said, "has been well educated, and never known hardships or misery until she reached this country; and you must carefully consider that she requires the society of her own sex to pass her time pleasantly so far from the land of her birth. You say that you have money enough to support her; then take my advice, and remove to Melbourne or Sydney, and enter into business, and where you can form new associations. The mines of Ballarat are no place for a young wife."

"O, I shall be company enough for her," he answered, carelessly, and with an air that plainly betokened that he considered I was meddling with things that did not concern me.

"You fool," I muttered, "stay here and you will be wifeless in less than a month. The girl will never be contented with such affection as you are disposed to give."

Not another word was spoken until we reached the store, and ushered Mr. Herrets into the room where the girl was seated. The latter looked up, smiled, but did not appear very enthusiastic or particularly overjoyed.

"Hullo, Molly," cried the lover, roughly, rushing frantically towards her, and throwing his arms around her neck; and in spite of a slight struggle, he succeeded in imprinting half a dozen kisses upon her cheeks and lips.

We noted that the interview was too interesting for us to witness, and we retired and left them together.

"Poor girl," muttered Fred, with a sigh; "what chance for happiness does she possess with a man whose education has been neglected, and whose manners have been blunted by a lengthy residence in the mines?"

"He is better than he appears," I replied, "and I have no doubt that they will soon understand each other's ways, and get along quite happily. We have no right to interfere."

"I think that we have. She is a *protégee* of ours, and as such it is our duty to see lest she comes to harm. I think that I shall object to this marriage."

Confound it. I feared as much all the time, but I was not disposed to relinquish all hope of getting Fred from committing himself to such a course. I knew that if my friend but gave the least encouragement to the girl she would repudiate her lover, and then I could readily foresee what would follow. Clergymen were not abundant at Ballarat, and Fred, I knew, had no thought of marriage.

I reasoned with Fred for a long time, and told him (God forgive me for the lie) that great affection existed between the parties, and that they were not disposed to show it before us, as we were comparatively strangers, and had no right to judge of their hearts or their heads; and at last I so worked on the mind of my friend that he readily accompanied me to the police office, where we were directed to a clergyman's, and with the reverend gentleman returned to the store, where our appearance created some surprise in the heart, at least, of one of the parties.

We insisted upon the girl's changing her clothes — the trunk which she spoke of having been found and taken to our place of business; and while she was doing so behind a screen of sail-cloth, we commenced making preparations for the wedding.

Mary presented an entirely different aspect when she appeared, dressed in her well-fitting garments; and although her face and hands were sunburned, and her manners were embarrassed, we did not fail to compliment her on her beauty, and to congratulate her on her near approaching nuptials.

"Let me speak with you for a moment," she said, turning to Fred just before the knot was tied.

Fred stepped a few paces from the group, and waited to hear her commands.

"When I made a promise to that man," she said, pointing to her lover, "I thought that I loved him. I was much younger than I am now, and knew but little of the world. Even when I reached these shores, I thought that my heart was entirely possessed by Mr. Herrets, and perhaps I should have continued to think so had not accident revealed to me what real love is."

Fred looked astonished and remained silent. He did not suspect the state of her heart.

"It would be unmaidenly," she continued, with a slight air of vexation to think that Fred remained cool, "for me to speak plainer, and if you cannot solve my meaning I must remain silent."

"I don't think that I understand you distinctly," my friend said, his face slightly flushing under a suspicion of her meaning.

"Do you wish to comprehend me?" she said, and her face was cast down while she asked the question.

Fred hesitated for a moment, and only for a moment. He glanced towards me and saw that I was watching the struggle that was going on in his mind, and his decision was instantly formed.

"We must not pursue this subject further," he said. "Believe me, it is better that we should not; for the sake of Mr. Herrets, and your own sake, do not ask me more questions."

"One word," she cried, hurriedly, as Fred turned away, and it seemed as though she could no longer control her emotion; "do you wish me to marry that man?" she demanded, with an earnestness that showed how much she had at stake.

"I do," he answered; and without waiting for another question he joined us.

The girl turned deadly pale, and for a few seconds was silent; but she rallied at length, and signified that she was ready to vow to love and cherish a man that I knew she had already commenced hating in her heart, and looked upon as the author of her misery. The clergyman, who was impatient to get his dinner, soon united the parties, and we saluted the bride.

"Let me go," she exclaimed, as her husband folded her in his rough embrace and covered her face with kisses. "Let me go, for I stifle in this place."

"Take your wife home," I said, "and be a kind husband to her. She will need all your care and attention."

They left the store, and I breathed a sigh of gratitude at the result. Fred's face, however, looked black and threatening, as though he was not entirely satisfied with his course.

"We have played a mean part in that marriage," he said, at length, "and I don't feel that I have acted justly. The girl detests her husband, and you know it."

"Of course I do," I replied, with great nonchalance; "but that is something she will outgrow in a few days, and if she does not he alone is to blame."

"I am not so sure of that," he replied, gloomily.

"Neither am I, but it will not affect your position or mine. We have done the best that we could, under the circumstances, to keep her honest, and I will ask you, in all candor, if she

would have been virtuous ten days from hence had she lived under this roof?"

He did not answer me, but lighted his pipe and puffed away in silence.

"The girl liked you," I continued, "and you at length discovered it. She is not a suitable wife for you, and I think too highly of your honor to suppose that you would blast her prospects for life and make her your mistress. Your residence here is short, and when you felt disposed to return home, would you desire to present the girl to your friends as a specimen of Australian beauty? Come, Fred, consider all things, and remember that you cannot accuse yourself of her ruin, even if she is not disposed to remain with her husband."

"You are right," he said; "passion blinded me for a moment, but now I can see that your advice is good. Let us talk no more on the subject, but hope for her happiness."

But we did talk on the subject frequently and earnestly; and as Mary's career was much as I supposed that it would be, I will follow it and give the reader the sequel.

Mr. Herrets removed his wife to his tent, and after the first week of his marriage paid but little attention to her comfort or her wants. A coldness soon sprang up between them, and then bitter quarrels ensued. The husband, while grasping for gold in the bowels of the earth, little thought that his neighbor was paying court to his wife, and that she received those attentions with eagerness. Women in Ballarat commanded a premium, for there were but few, and those principally of the lowest class. A few of the highest officers under government had their wives with them, but the husbands guarded them with more than Oriental jealousy, and it was a rare sight to see them in the street or at windows. There was little cause for wonder, then, that a man, whose good looks were a passport, should have ingratiated himself into the affections of Mrs. Herrets, and that one day they should leave Ballarat in company. We were in the store one afternoon, about a month after the marriage, when Mr. Herrets rushed in.

"Is she here?" he demanded, his face looking like a demon's.

"Who here?" I asked, calmly, although I suspected his errand.

"My wife," he shouted. "Darn her, I don't know where she is. She is playing some of her pranks, and I'll fix her for it."

He rushed out of the store frantically, and uttered a profusion of oaths as he dashed through the streets, making inquiries of every one that he met respecting his wife. Some laughed at him, while others, after questioning him until they had arrived at the facts, would gravely shake their heads, and express an entire ignorance of the woman's whereabouts. Herrets then made application to the police office, but was curtly informed that the police had something to attend to besides hunting after men's wives.

Desperate with rage, and vowing all sorts of vengeance upon the frail woman, the baffled husband once more sought our store and implored our aid. He even offered a considerable sum of money if we would unite with him and make search for her; but we refused his money, and declined for a long time to interfere, until at length his importunities caused us to yield, and after we extracted promises that he would be likely to keep, we concluded to help him.

We sent the young husband back to his tent, and bade him make arrangements to be gone at least two days, and to bring back with him some article of clothing that had belonged to the runaway. He obeyed our instructions, and by the time he had returned our three horses were saddled and ready for a start. We lost no time in getting under way, and in less than an hour we were seven miles from Ballarat, on the road to Melbourne, the nearest city that the runaways could reach. Sydney we considered as out of the question, for its distance of five hundred miles was not likely to attract travellers who were journeying for speed and flying for safety.

We pushed on, stopping only long enough to make inquiries of men on the road, and at length we got on the trail of the fugitives. They were travelling on horseback, like ourselves, but were mounted on worthless animals, that threatened to break down at every step; so we were told. The last farmer that gave us information said that he had spoken to them, and supplied them with bread, and that he did not think they were more than ten miles in advance of us.

This information gave us renewed life, and we spurred on until our horses were in a foaming sweat; and just as we began to think that the runaways had diverged from the beaten path, we caught sight of them riding along as leisurely, and with as much independence, as man and wife.

Herrets rushed forward, and uttered oath after oath as he caught sight of his wife, while the latter applied her riding whip to the sides of her steed, in the vain endeavor to escape; but finding that we gained on her and her paramour, she suffered her horse to fall into a walk, and apparently took no further notice of us.

Not so with her companion, whose name was Delvin, a young and good-looking fellow; and had we not been present, he would have laughed at the demands of Herrets, for he was as bold as a lion, and was just the kind of a man that a romantic girl like Mary would take a fancy to.

"Villain!" shouted Herrets, presenting an old horse pistol, that looked as though it had seen service in the war of Cromwell, "stop, and account to me for the seduction of my wife, or I'll shoot you as you fly!"

"Shoot and be d——d!" replied Delvin, with a sneer; "but remember, I can use a pistol as well as you." And as he spoke, he drew from his belt a six inch revolver, and coolly waited for Herrets to commence hostilities.

This the latter was in no hurry to do, when he saw that his opponent was better armed than himself; so he checked his horse, and waited for us to come up.

We rode leisurely towards the runaways, and did not think it worth our while to make a show of hostilities, for while we had promised the husband to assist him, we did not consider that we were bound to fight his battles.

"Put up your pistol," said Fred, calmly, when we had reached the woman and her paramour; "there will be no use for it at present."

Delvin hesitated for a moment, and only for a moment; then, with an oath, he returned his pistol to its case, and waited our proceedings.

As for the woman, she appeared the most indifferent person in the

group, and instead of being overwhelmed with shame, actually smiled at the expression of misery depicted upon her husband's face.

"We shall have to relieve you of your fair charge," Fred said, addressing Mr. Delvin; "civilization has hardly arrived at such a point in Australia that a man can run off with another's wife, and expect to escape punishment."

"The woman goes with me!" cried Delvin, fiercely, and his hand again sought his pistol; but seeing that we took no notice of the movement, he withdrew it slowly, and appeared undecided what to do.

"Of course, you are not in earnest when you speak thus," replied Fred, quite coolly; "you must be aware, if you enter Melbourne in company with this man's wife, and we are disposed to lodge information against you, that a long residence at the hulks would be your portion."

Delvin remained silent, but he looked as though he would like to try the issue of the affair with an exchange of shots.

"We have promised this man to help recover his wife, and we mean to keep our word. We have nothing against you, and therefore do not think it worth while to risk our lives exchanging shots; but Herrets, here ——"

"Ah, then he can meet me," cried Delvin, eagerly.

"By no means," replied Fred, with great distinctness; "you have injured him sufficiently already, and it appears to me strange that the world should think a husband bound to demand reparation by receiving the contents of a pistol, and then consider that satisfaction has been accorded."

"Then you deny me a chance to satisfy the husband of this woman?" demanded Delvin, and his looks showed how eagerly he would have shot Herrets had he been allowed.

"Certainly we do, and we have a piece of advice to give you — don't return to Ballarat for a few months, or you might fare badly. The miners have a prejudice against people who run off with wives not belonging to them, and but little agitation would be necessary to serve you as men of your kind are served in California."

"May I ask how that is?" Delvin inquired.

"They are tried by Lynch law," was Fred's laconic answer.

The seducer glared at us as though he would like to encounter each individual singly, and I did not know but that he would charge upon us, and risk the odds, great as they were.

"What have I done, Mary Ann, that you should run off and leave me?" cried Herrets, speaking for the first time.

His wife maintained a profound silence.

"Didn't I do all that I could to make you happy and comfortable?" he continued.

"No," she replied, with a defiant air, "you did not. You never spoke to me kindly, or asked if I was contented. I went to your tent with but little love for you, and now I have less. Did you seek to gain my affections, or to banish from my mind the image of a man that I felt I could die for?"

She looked hard at Fred, but the latter avoided her glance.

"I may have to go back with you, but I warn you that I feel only

loathing and contempt for your home, for you, and every one in Ballarat."

We did not seek to check her, for we knew that her outburst of rage would end in tears, and we were not mistaken. She wept bitterly, and upbraided Fred and myself as the authors of her misfortunes; and even while she was lamenting her fate, we turned her horse's head in the direction of Ballarat.

Her paramour sat upon his animal sullen, and undecided what to do; and without stopping to exchange words with him, we commenced our journey homeward.

Even after we were miles distant, we could see him still motionless, standing upon the broad prairie, as though he had not determined upon what course he should pursue. But he never renewed his attempts on the virtue of Mrs. Herrets, and when next we heard of him he was in the mines of Bathney, where he was killed by the caving in of a shaft.

As for Herrets and his wife, they took our advice, and moved to Melbourne, where there was society and enjoyment. The husband went into business there, and became quite wealthy; and Mrs. Herrets was noted for her lively disposition and fondness of company. She became a patron of the Theatre Royal, and gave many a hungry actor a good dinner; and once, when I had run down to Melbourne from the mines, to transact a little business, she sent me a pressing invitation to visit the theatre, and witness her *début* in the "Honeymoon," she playing "Juliana," for the benefit of some actor who wished to insure a good house, and took that method to accomplish it.

I accepted the invitation, but did not consider her acting as likely to redound to the credit of the profession; and that is the end of the history, so far as my knowledge extends, of Mrs. Herrets and husband.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Collecting Taxes of the Miners.

About a week after the inspector had received his injuries, he was enabled to get out, and one afternoon he sent word that if we were desirous of accompanying him on his tax collecting expedition he should be happy of our company, and that if we were disposed to go we had better meet him at his office, on horseback, at two o'clock.

As it was near the hour when we received the invitation, we lost no time in getting ready, and we were on the spot promptly.

About thirty policemen were drawn up in front of the office, awaiting the appearance of the inspector, who was examining the books in which were recorded the names of the tax-paying miners, checking those who had refused to pay at the end of the previous month, and placing a cross against the names of miners who had worked out their taxes on

the road, on the ground that they had not made enough out of their claims to allow government the large sum of thirty-four shillings per month.

The tax applied to all, and there was no chance to evade it. The fortunate and unfortunate were alike liable to the officers of the crown, knowing no distinction, so they said; but I found before the close of the day that that assertion was a fallacy, and that there was a favorite class at Ballarat, and that they were rarely troubled by the inspector's visits, and if short of money were seldom required to pay taxes.

"I am glad that you have come," Mr. Brown said, hastily glancing from the large books before him to welcome us; "we are going through with our monthly ceremony, and I thought you would like to witness it. It is not an agreeable one, I confess, but duty compels me to do many things that I disapprove of."

"In what quarter will your honor go first?" asked the sergeant of the police squad, addressing the inspector.

"The Irish district," returned Mr. Brown. "We can then," he continued, "strike into the Chinamen's quarters, and visit our folks on our way home."

As we rode up, a number of Irishmen were smoking their pipes at the entrance of their tents or huts, evidently expecting us, for it was tax-collecting day, and they knew very well that government would not let the opportunity pass of adding to its wealth. No surprise was manifested, therefore, when our force halted, and those within hearing were requested to bring out their gold.

"Is it there ye are, Mr. Brown?" cried an old fellow, who was called Pat Regan. "It's wishing to see yer face this many a day I've desired, long life to ye, and it's dead I feared ye was."

"Is your tax ready?" asked the inspector, shortly, being accustomed to the blarney of the man.

"Whist! What blackguard would be after thinking of money, or taxes, or any thing else when yer honor is near? Will yer enter me tent and partake of me hospitalities?" demanded Pat, with a serious face, and a show of politeness that was refreshing, knowing as I did that it was intended as burlesque.

"Don't stand there chattering, but hand over your month's taxes," replied Mr. Brown, sternly, not liking the smiles that he saw on the faces of Pat's friends, who were clustered around enjoying the conversation.

"Ah, glory to God, but it's lucky men we are to have so kind-hearted an inspector, so that when we is unfortunate he knows how to have compassion on us. Lads," Pat continued, turning to the crowd, "don't forget to mention Mr. Brown in your prayers, 'cos he's overlooked the trifling sum that I owe him."

This long harangue was received with shouts of laughter, during the continuance of which Mr. Pat Regan stood before the inspector, with hat in hand, and a face as demure as though no deviltry was at work within his heart.

Mr. Brown did not reply, but made an almost imperceptible motion to the sergeant of the force. The latter, and a private, quietly dismounted, produced a pair of handcuffs, and before Mr. Regan had

recovered from his surprise, a sharp click was heard, and he was a prisoner, both wrists being confined by a pair of stout steel bracelets.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Regan, with a show of indignation. "I'm a subject of the queen, and a free-born Irishman, and it's kings me ancestors were six hundred years ago. It's little they thought that one of the blood of the Regans would be used in this way."

The inspector paid no attention to his words, but occupied himself with receiving money from a number of miners who were disposed to pay their taxes without a murmur, and didn't wish the bother of a dispute.

"Move on," said Mr. Brown, at length, and the cavalcade started with Pat Regan in the centre.

"Mr. Brown — inspector dear — O darling, listen to me for a moment," cried out our Irish friend.

"Well, what is wanting?" inquired our chief, halting.

"And what is ye taking me off for?" asked Regan, indignantly.

"For non-payment of taxes."

"And who refused to pay taxes? — tell me that, Mr. Brown."

"You declined paying; so of course you will have to devote the next three days to work on the road. Move on."

"Hold a minute, Mr. Brown, for here's the money; but it's little good it will do ye, mind what I say, for to-night I shall write to my friend the governor-general, and relate the circumstance of this arrest, and me money will be sent back with many an apology, let me tell ye. It's a relation I am of the governor's, his wife being a Regan on the side of me grandfather; and it's many a time I've talked with her ladyship when we went to school together in the county of Cork."

This speech was also received with shouts of laughter by those assembled, and even while Pat was paying over his dust he continued to grumble and threaten; and when we got clear of him he bade us adieu with a mocking smile, perfectly satisfied to think that he had delayed us all that he was able to, and that if he did ultimately have to pay over the money, he afforded sport enough for his companions to last a week.

"Is that a sample of the difficulties that you have to encounter?" I asked of the inspector, as we left a portion of the Irish district behind us, and approached another quarter, where the inhabitants did not appear to be doing so well in their operations.

"If we never encountered worse cases than that I should be contented," Mr. Brown replied. "I knew that Pat had the money, for he had served me in that manner half a dozen times; but I also knew that he had a great reluctance against working on the road, and that to save himself he would even sell a portion of his claim, if that was necessary. He has made money since he has worked in the mines, and I will do Pat the justice of saying that, with the exception of celebrating St. Patrick's Day, he knows how to save it."

As he ceased speaking, we drew up before a ragged hut, at the entrance of which stood a stout Irishwoman, with a terrible dirty-faced child in her arms.

"It's little ye'll get here," she shouted, shaking her huge fists at the

inspector, and spanking the child, who set up a roar of fright. "Go on, an' the divil be wid ye, for not a ha'penny do ye get."

"Now we shall hear lying," muttered the inspector, when he saw a grin upon our faces. "Of all the she devils in the mines, she is the worst."

"Tell Mike that we want his license fee," Mr. Brown said, addressing the huge female, who varied her time in spanking her child and making faces at the police force.

"To the divil wid ye and yer fees, ye lazy spalpeens. There's no money in the house, and if there was ye shouldn't have it. Do ye think that I can pick up goold like dirt? or what do ye think?"

"Come, come, Judy," the inspector said, "we have heard your complaints so often that we don't believe them. Let me have the thirty-four shillings without delay."

"Who do you call Judy? I'm Mrs. Michael O'Flaherty, and a bitter husband and one more honest don't exist; and that's more than I can say of some women who's got husbands tied to 'em. It's little ye think I know of ye; so don't, if ye valey yer reputations, stand there chattering, but pass on to thim that gets the money."

"We are not afraid of our reputation, Judy," the inspector said. "We know that you are bad, but we don't believe that you can corrupt the whole of the squad."

"O, ye murdering villains, to thus slander an honest female who has only her vartue to protect her." Then raising her voice as though to attract the attention of some one within the house, she shouted, in satirical language, "It's little me husband cares about me, or he'd niver stand by and see me treated thus, and I niver making the least complaint in the world. It's mighty fine husbands there is in the world now, and it's little use they are to us fable females."

As though to avenge her injuries on some one, she gave the child a rap over a certain portion of his anatomy that presented the broadest disk, and his wild howls were heard for half a mile.

"If there's law to be had in this country I'll have it," Judy continued, growing more excited as she recited her wrongs. "If ye want yer tax, why don't ye come here after it in a dacent fashion, and not begin by insulting me and me own, and then frightening the child out of its wits. Didn't yer mothers larn ye manners at all, and do ye think we can stand all sorts of barbarities?"

Before the inspector could return an answer, a stout, broad-shouldered fellow sneaked to the door, and his appearance was greeted with laughter.

"We have unkennelled the fox, have we?" the sergeant of the squad said. "Hitherto we have had to dig for him."

"Come, Mike, where is your tax?" asked the inspector, in a mild tone.

"He's no money, I tell ye," screamed the woman, shaking one of her huge fists at the officer in a defiant manner, and glancing towards her lord, as though warning him of the consequences of gainsaying her word. "I've told ye that he'd no money, and now be off, and the divil go wid ye."

"Pace, Judy, dear," remonstrated Mike, in a subdued tone; "it's the police who always behave like rale gentlemen."

"Hear him," screamed the indignant woman, "turn upon his own lawful, married wife, and abuse her like a baste. Why don't ye bite me in two, ye little brat?"

She gave her child a shake that made him think there was an earthquake, and then supplied him with a liberal allowance of food that kind nature had wisely provided for the purpose of keeping children quiet, even for a few minutes.

"Whist, Judy; don't be after trating the child that way," remonstrated the father, who appeared to have some spirit when the welfare of his heir was concerned.

"Ah, go on insulting me — don't spare reproaches. I'm defenceless now."

Woman's last resource, tears, were quickly called up, and under their shadow Mike sneaked towards us, as though about to pay his money and have done with the trouble; but before he could accomplish his good resolution the woman had cleared her eyes, and in a voice that started us, yelled, —

"Mike, ye divil, come here this instant."

The hen-pecked husband did not dare to disobey. He cast an imploring, half-sheepish look towards his wife.

"We have delayed long enough," Mr. Brown said. "Sergeant, put on the irons."

The sergeant dismounted quite coolly, and summoned six men to his assistance. I noticed that the officers did not display any great alacrity, and acted as though quite ashamed of the duty that they were to enter upon.

"The sergeant means to have assistance enough," Fred remarked, addressing the inspector.

"You will see," the latter returned; and we did, sure enough; for no sooner did the officers lay hands upon Michael than the woman dropped her child, and with a wild shout threw herself upon them. The first poor devil whom she spotted lost a handful of hair — but as it was as red as fire it was no great sacrifice to the owner — the second had a piece of skin clawed off his nose, and the third reluctantly parted with a piece of flesh weighing nearly a quarter of an ounce, torn forcibly from his cheek. The police endeavored to keep her at arms' length without success — she broke down their defences, and clawed the hair from their heads in the most scientific manner; and yet she had all the fighting to do, for Michael remained in the custody of two officers without offering to strike a blow for liberty.

The war was at length fiercely contested, for the officers, finding that they were likely to be placed *hors du combat*, made a rush towards the Amazon; and while two seized her arms, two more grasped her legs, and I am obliged to confess that the police did not display much delicacy in the latter operation. In spite of her struggles — in defiance of her imprecations, and calls for Mike to interfere in her behalf — she was carried bodily towards the hut, and poised in the air for a moment; and then, with a "one, two, three, and away she goes," was thrown head foremost through the door, and landed in the middle of the hut all in a heap.

"You have kilt me wife," moaned Mike, who watched the operation with considerable anxiety for his better half.

"Hang her, she's skinned me from head to foot," muttered one of the officers, wiping his bleeding face on a handkerchief, and showing his wounds to the inspector.

"Skinned!" echoed another; "if she had only taken skin I shouldn't mind it much; but, blast her, she has torn flesh and muscle from my face."

"I'm sorry for your misfortunes, but we will have her arrested on a warrant to-morrow, and fined," the inspector said. "Bring Mike along, and set him at work on the roads for a few days."

"Arrah, now, Mr. Inspector, don't be after doing that," shouted the Irishman; but in defiance of his cries he was handcuffed and driven along with the rest.

We had got a few yards from the hut when Mrs. Judy appeared at the door, looking a little the worse for her late usage. Her hair was hanging over her shoulders, and her dress was torn in a dozen places. Both feet were bare, and none too clean; but little she cared for her appearance just then.

"For the love of St. Patrick, Mr. Inspector, stop a minute, and don't be after carrying away Mike, the poor, harmless divil. Lave him here wid me, and we'll pay the tax without a murmur."

"Too late," cried Mr. Brown, without turning his head, although I could see that he was disposed to come to terms.

"Ough, don't say that, bless yer handsome face and yer kind heart. What could I do, sure, widout me Mike? Lave him here wid me, and if the blackguard has been insulting ye I'll punish him, depind upon it."

"It's not of your husband that we complain," the inspector said; "he would act decently, and pay his tax, if you would let him."

"Ah, then — glory to God — poor Mike is safe; and I thought all along that he wouldn't disgrace his Judy so much as to refuse what a just gentleman like ye demands. Pay the officer the tax, and say no more about it. It's but a trifle."

The sergeant looked at Mr. Brown, and the latter glanced at the sergeant. There was but little use in making Mike work on the road, if he had the money to pay for his month's mining; so a halt was called, and the woman quickly poured out dust enough from a cracked teacup to satisfy the demands of government, and then Mike was restored to the dirty arms of his better half.

"I hope that all the taxes collected do not come as hard as this," Fred said, addressing the inspector.

"They all pay out their money with an ill grace; but our worst cases, with one exception, are over."

As we passed through the several districts, many of the miners stood ready with their gold, and after answering to their names, paid their taxes without a murmur; and even while disputes were going on, they did not prevent the clerks who accompanied us from attending to their duties.

All those who did not possess the cash were required to follow in our train, as captives, to work out a certain amount on the roads. Men who had been sick, and were incapable of raising ten shillings, were shown no indulgence whatever; and although we often interceded, and our wishes were granted in every case, yet we felt that the inspector's

orders were rigid, and that we were imposing upon good nature, to make requests in every instance where poverty compelled a miner to decline paying his tax.

At length we reached the Chinese district, and the Celestials turned out in great numbers to receive us. Many handed the clerks the money that was due without a word of comment, and we experienced no trouble until we reached the quarters of Yam Kow, an old fellow whose tail reached to the ground, and who was reported to be the most miserly of all the Chinese at Ballarat. That he had money there was no doubt, for he was always at work, or trading with his countrymen, and he was never known to spend a shilling for clothing or food. What he lived on was unknown, and could only be conjectured; but it was said that Kow had been seen nights setting traps for snakes and rats, and even lizards were considered quite delicate meat for him.

Traps of most ingenious and cunning device were also set for birds, and Kow had been known to waste a few grains of rice, for the purpose of attracting them to his fatal snares.

The bodies of the birds were sold by Kow, and if he could find no market, he would hold on to them until he did; and if, after all his trouble, none of his countrymen were disposed to buy, the unhappy Chinaman would devour them himself; and even if fly-blown and slightly decomposed, it made no difference to Kow; his greatest anxiety was on account of not being able to get a shilling for the body of the bird that he was at length compelled to eat. With the plumage of the birds — and the feathers of the birds of Australia are of the most gaudy hue — he made, during evenings, rare trinkets, and magnificent wreaths, and sold them to miners at a fair price, to be taken home as curiosities. I had a box filled with such articles, and which I valued highly; but they were lost on my voyage home, while crossing the Isthmus of Suez.

We found old Yam Kow seated before his hut, which was made of bits of sticks, pieces of boards, stones, and mud, all cemented and fitted together in the neatest manner, and what was more wonderful than all, perfectly water tight, and as clean inside as possible.

The old man was hard at work, or pretended to be, on one of his wreaths, and seemed not to notice that we were halting in front of his abode.

"Hullo, Yam Kow!" cried the inspector, "putty mi more money, hey?" which barbarous jargon, it seems, is always considered necessary to use when talking with a Chinese, no matter whether the latter understands English or not.

The true meaning of Mr. Brown's interrogation was, whether Yam's tax money was ready or not.

"No hab," returned the Chinaman, without looking up.

"How, no hab? — putty mi more day. No can see?"-demanded Mr. Brown.

"No hab," repeated the old fellow, continuing his work industriously.

"Why no hab?" the inspector asked.

"All go — buy ricey — buy torayan tan pon, and no hab."

"Then workey on rodey ten (holding up his fingers) day. Chinaman no good for shovel — work more days Englishman. Come."

"No can come now. Pay money by by," the Chinaman said, thinking that his promise to pay before long would suffice.

"Pay money now — no pay money now, go!" repeated the inspector, who managed to make himself understood.

"No pay," the old fellow said, and as the sounds escaped his lips, the sergeant dismounted from his horse and approached him.

"Come," that worthy said, and he laid his huge hand upon the Celestial, in close proximity to his pigtail.

"No go," repeated Yam.

"Start your stumps," cried the policeman; and he lifted the Chinaman from the ground by his pigtail, and almost held him at arm's length.

"Me pay! me pay!" he roared, to the great delight of the police, and a few of Yam's countrymen who were standing near.

The sergeant released the old fellow, and he rapidly uttered a number of expressions in his native tongue, that I will swear were not complimentary to the English character.

After he had thus vented his anger, he drew from the folds of his inside trousers a little bag of dust, which, upon being weighed, was found to contain just the amount, to a scale, that was required for the payment of his tax, and after checking his name, we rode on.

In this manner the tax was collected from the miners of Ballarat.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Murden and Steel Spring arrive from Melbourne.

We were sitting in our store eating supper one afternoon, about a week after our tax-collecting tour, and were wondering why Smith did not make his appearance, as he certainly had been gone long enough, and were debating the propriety of writing or visiting Melbourne for the purpose of finding him, when a person, dressed quite respectably, but wearing a slouched hat over his eyes, that entirely concealed his face, entered the store and looked around as though anxious to purchase goods, but was disappointed in not meeting with an assortment.

"We shall be happy to serve you in a few days," Fred said. "Our stock is on the road, and will be here shortly."

"Vell, I guess I can vait," returned a voice that sounded familiar, and our visitor removed his hat and revealed the not over-pleasing countenance of Steel Spring.

We could hardly believe the evidence of our senses, yet there stood the cunning scamp before us, with his long limbs and lank body, as supple as ever, and grinning with delight at our astonishment.

"I 'ope you've not forgotten old friends," he said, extending his hand, which neither of us accepted, but which act did not discompose him in the least; for he only grinned the harder, and appeared to look upon our refusal as a matter of course.

"Where did you come from?" I asked, as soon as I recovered from my astonishment.

"The old place — Melbourne; 'ave 'ad lots of fun there, but thought I'd look at the country for a change of air. Can't stay long, though; so don't press me to stop over a week."

"You certainly have lost none of your impudence by residing at Melbourne," Fred replied, and the fellow grinned at the compliment. "But tell us how you escaped from prison," Fred continued.

"Escaped?" asked Steel Spring, with an injured look; "I'd scorn such a breach of confidence between gentlemen. No, sir, I did not escape, but was pardoned for the service I've rendered my country."

"And the bushrangers that Murden carried to Melbourne?" Fred asked, with some anxiety.

"Vell, they suffered for their crimes, and are all forgotten by this time," replied the wretch, with a grin.

"Hanged?" I asked.

"Every mother's son of 'em, and served 'em right, too. Property is respected, nowadays, and a miner can travel all the way from Ballarat to Melbourne, and lose nothing if he's got nothing to lose," the grinning scamp replied.

"I've got a friend vid me," Steel Spring said at length, "and perhaps you'd like to see him."

"Who is he?" we asked.

"O, a man you used to know — Murden I believe is his name, and he's in some vay connected with the police force of Melbourne."

The grinning rascal! he had been sent by our friend to notify us of his arrival, and that was the way he performed his duty. But before we had time to administer to him a sound kicking, the lieutenant was with us.

We need not tell the reader that we welcomed him with our whole hearts, and that he appeared as delighted to see us as we were glad to see him.

"I have just arrived in time, I see," Murden said, glancing at our supper, "and, by George, I'm glad that I've a place to rest to-night, for I'm tired. We've been three days on the road, on horseback all the time, with the exception of a few hours during the extreme heat of noon. Our animals got used up about five miles from Ballarat; so I footed it to town. I suppose that you recollect that scamp," — pointing to Steel Spring, who bowed low at the compliment. "I've taken him into my service on his promise to be of good behavior; but I don't think that his word is to be relied on; so I cane him about once in twenty-four hours, to see if what little goodness there is in him cannot be brought out."

Steel Spring shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, There is no joke in what he is telling, as I can testify.

"But how came Steel Spring to find us first?" I asked.

"Well, when our horses broke down I sent him ahead to find out in what quarter of the town you were located, and I followed more leisurely. The first policeman that I met directed me here, so that I found no difficulty, and was not compelled to wait for my *notorati* fellow-traveller at the cross-roads."

"But how comes it that you are in citizen's dress, instead of the blue uniform?"

"Ah, my boys, that is the secret; but as I have nothing to conceal from you, I will confess I am the bearer of secret despatches to the inspector of this district in relation to the mining tax. But while I am talking, set Steel Spring at work cooking supper, for I am famished, and I suppose that he is also."

It was only necessary to nod acquiescence to the lieutenant, when Steel Spring stripped off his coat and set to work in earnest. In a few minutes he had ransacked our private stores and spread our few dishes upon a box, that answered for a table, in the most tempting array; and with a few dried branches he set the teakettle to boiling, and almost before we thought that he had made a beginning, he announced that supper was ready for his superior.

"By the way," Murden said, while partaking of our fare, "I overtook Smith on his way to this place, and I should think that he would arrive by to-morrow morning. He has two large loads of goods, and I think that he has made a speculation in buying them, from the hints that he dropped to me in confidence. One of your large American clipper ships arrived at Melbourne with an assorted cargo of Yankee notions, and as the market was, in mercantile parlance, glutted with goods of all descriptions, a forced sale was effected, and Smith bought largely at a low figure. He is in good spirits, and says that he never felt so well in his life as since he was married."

"Married?" we repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes, Smith has married Becky Lang, and a good wife she will make him. The lady's father, the convict, still remains on his cattle ranch, and, for some strange reason, refuses to move to Melbourne, where Becky has taken up her residence. The ceremony was performed at the latter place, and I was one of the witnesses."

We could readily understand why the old man refused to move. The banks of the brook near which he resided were too rich in gold deposits to be given up until a competence was acquired. We wondered if Smith revealed the knowledge of the money which we had dug successfully for, and which we had shared between us. We feared that he had, and that Murden would consider we had acted unfair in the transaction. But as he said nothing on the subject we were not disposed to introduce it.

"How is my old friend Brown, and how does he like the duties at this station?" Murden asked, as he rose from the supper table, and Steel Spring took his place.

We gave a favorable account of the inspector, and while the lieutenant was listening, a sudden thought entered our heads, which we were resolved to carry into effect, and thereby get square with Mr. Brown, who had played us a trick some time before. Murden was anxious to speak with the inspector and deliver his letters, but he wished to do it in a secret manner, so that no suspicions should be awakened that he was on a government mission, or that government was preparing to strengthen its force at Ballarat. The authorities knew that a struggle must occur between the miners and the police, and it had been considered advisable to hasten the conflict before the miners gained more

strength, defeat them badly, as the council at Melbourne supposed could be easily done, hang a few for high treason, and afterwards the mining tax could be collected without any difficulty whatever.

Such was the programme that the governor-general and his council laid out, and they supposed that it could be executed; and even Murden labored under the same impression until we convinced him of his error, and advised him by all means to keep out of the conflict if possible, as which ever way the battle went the police would be blamed, and obtain no credit for their exposure or bravery. The sequel showed that we were right in our premises. As I said before, the lieutenant was anxious to see the inspector, but did not care about visiting his office; so we despatched a note by a passing policeman, requesting Mr. Brown's company instantly, and advising him to come alone, as we had two suspicious persons in the store, and we thought that a reward had been offered for their apprehension, which we were desirous of obtaining. We got Murden's consent to act in the plot, and by the aid of a wig his disguise was complete. As for Steel Spring, he was to remain as he was, without disguise, but was to vehemently deny his cognomen, and puzzle Mr. Brown if possible.

The instant the inspector got our note he loaded himself with pistols and started for our store. By the time that he arrived it was dark, but we had a candle burning that but dimly illuminated the room, and prevented him from distinguishing objects.

"There are some lodgers that we have for to-night," Fred said, pointing to Murden and Steel Spring, both of whom sat with their faces from the light, as though not desirous of attracting attention.

"I am sure it gives me pleasure to meet friends of yours," the inspector said, with a grim smile; and he rubbed his hands as though already the capturer of two notorious robbers.

"Who are they?" Mr. Brown asked, in a low whisper, watching every motion of Murden and Steel Spring, as though he expected a manifestation of hostility on their part.

"Don't know," replied Fred, in the same tone, "but I suspect that they are bushrangers."

"Ah, ah, I have no doubt of it," the inspector said. "Have your pistols handy, for they may resist when I arrest them."

Mr. Brown took a seat, and every opportunity that he could get he would scrutinize the half-hidden faces of Murden and Steel Spring; but owing to the light being bad, he was unable to gratify his curiosity. Fred and myself conversed on various matters, about the yield of gold for the coming year, and whether the prices of goods would decline before the wet set in, but Mr. Brown was too anxious for a capture to join us, and had not the spirit of evil actuated Steel Spring, we should have kept the inspector in suspense for an hour or two. Steel Spring was too mercurial to remain dormant for any length of time, and with a desire to stir Mr. Brown into activity he said, in a carcless sort of way, —

"By the vay, I 'eard that these 'ere mines vas paying wery vell."

Mr. Brown started, as I knew that he would recollect the voice, and he hastily glanced towards us to see if we did not mark it also; but we appeared to pay no attention, and continued our conversation.

"You have never been in Ballarat before?" the inspector said, addressing Steel Spring.

"No, I ean't say that I 'ave. My time has been so mueh oeeupied vid other duties that I 'ave not been able to visit all the plaees I'd vish to."

"Perhaps you would have no objeetion to inform the eompany of the manner in whieh your livelihood is and has been obtained?" the inspector asked, nervously handling a pair of pistols in his eoat poeket.

"O, I've been in the travelling line," the long-limbed wretch replied, with a grin.

"Then perhaps you will have the kindness to travel with me, Mr. Steel Spring," eried the inspeetor, suddenly starting from his seat, and covering the persons of Murden and his servant with a pair of horse pistols that earried sixteen to the pound.

Neither of the parties moved or showed surprise, but we were astonished when we heard the inspeetor utter a shrill whistle, and before it died away half a dozen blue-eoated polieemen rushed into the room, armed with pistols and swords.

"You see that resistanee is useless," the inspeetor said, addressing Steel Spring and Murden; "I know both of you, and bigger raseals never went unhanged."

"If you know me, pray tell me my name," Murden said, in as gruff a tone as he could assume.

"I ean't mention your name at present, but from your looks I've no doubt that you are some murdering seoundrel. Any jury would eonviet you without hesitaney."

Fred and I exploded with laughter, and even Steel Spring, fortified as he was with the proteetion of Murden, and a full pardon for all past offences, roared with glee.

Mr. Brown looked astonished and indignant, but he did not give up his hostile attitude. Even his men lost their savage glare, and waited for an explanation, whieh we were in no hurry to give.

"Put up your pistols, Mr. Brown," I said; "you have no use for them here."

"But what is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"Send your men to the station-house, and we will explain."

"But these ——"

He pointed to the supposed bushrangers.

"We will go bail for their appearanee to-morrow morning," I replied.

The inspector made a sign to his men, and they rather reluetantly dispersed. They were as anxious to know the seeret of the mystery as their ehief.

"Now, gentlemen," Mr. Brown said, with some severity, "I am waiting to hear an aeeount of your strange eonduet."

"Do you reeolleet," Fred asked, "of being disguised as an old man, and of asking two Amerieans what they thought of the annexation question?"

"Pshaw, that was a joke," he returned, pettishly.

"Do you reeolleet that you laughed quite heartily when we promised to retaliate, and 'sell' you on the first favorable opportunity, and that we were defied to do it?" Fred eontinued.

Mr. Brown nodded.

"Well, then we are even," I said.

"I don't see that you are," the inspector cried. "Here are two notorious criminals who should be safely locked up, and yet you ask me to spare them until morning. I know them both, and will pledge my word that they have stolen more gold dust than any other two parties in Australia."

"And I will pledge my word that I can't begin to prig with the head of the police force in Ballarat," cried Murden, who could remain silent no longer.

Mr. Brown sprang to his feet with indignation stamped upon every line of his face, but before he could proceed to extremities, Murden threw off his wig, unrolled his coat collar, and stood before the inspector as lieutenant of the Melbourne police force, and consequently one grade lower in rank than Mr. Brown.

"Murden," the inspector exclaimed, extending his hand in astonishment.

"That's me, Brown, and I beg that you will forgive me for my share of this plot. It was to retaliate, I believe, for some joke that you perpetrated a few days ago."

"Yes, but this matter is serious," Mr. Brown muttered.

"I grant that; especially when you spoke about my stealing. Faith, I began to think that I should be the inmate of your town prison, before long, unless I confessed."

"Well, perhaps I was rather fast in my charges; but you know that your wig altered your face, and in fact, seeing you in company with this notorious ——"

Mr. Brown pointed to Steel Spring, and that worthy individual grinned with delight at the excitement that he had created.

"Yes, I rather think that we have met afore," he said; "don't you remember how you ran after me and my pal ven ve vere goin' to Sydney?"

"You scoundrel," replied the inspector, with some warmth, "I only wish that I had the custody of you for a few months."

"I 'ave no doubt of it; but I shan't give you a chance now. I've turned 'onest, and intends to lead a different life." And Steel Spring grinned in triumph, and opened and shut his long, flexible limbs with wonderful dexterity.

"You turned honest!" muttered the inspector, with an incredulous glance.

"That's the vay that ve is doubted," whined the treacherous scamp, wiping his eyes, and pretending to feel as though his heart was broken; "ven ve leaves off our bad vays, and becomes associates for the police, then ve is suspected of being bad. There's precious little 'couragement for us."

"Don't be too hard on the lad," the lieutenant said, "for he helped us convict half a dozen of the worst bushrangers in the country, a few weeks ago, and he saved his own life by ——"

"Turning government evidence, I'll be sworn," cried the inspector, eagerly.

The lieutenant nodded, and continued, —

"Two or three of the fellows tried to get clear, on the ground that they were prisoners in the hands of the bushrangers, and I'll confess that the plea was having a telling effect on the jury; but when Steel Spring opened his mouth, he brought them."

"And didn't you tell me how to swear, and didn't I do it?" the wretch exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Silence, you fool!" and Steel Spring, obedient as a dog, held his tongue.

"The fact of it is," Murden said, after a pause, "the government has granted the fellow a full pardon, and I have taken him into my service for the present, in hopes that his reformation will be complete."

"I know that it will," chimed in the lank wretch, but a look silenced him.

"And now suppose you should tell me why you have paid Ballarat a visit?" the inspector inquired.

"I'm on business connected with the government, and to consult with you in relation to the mining tax."

"Will government send the troops?" asked the inspector, eagerly.

"Hush!" replied Murden, glancing towards us; "you should be more cautious, Mr. Brown."

"O, these are friends of ours, and espouse our side, and, if necessary, will fight for us," returned the inspector.

"Softly," rejoined Fred; "we fight for no one but ourselves, and we have never given you or a living man to understand that we will take up arms against the miners. The question is too new for a decision on our part; slightly as we have investigated it, we must say that our sympathies are with the miners instead of the government."

"Just as I supposed," muttered Murden; but whether in disappointment or in anger I could not tell.

"Why, I really thought that I had proved to you that a tax was necessary," Mr. Brown said, in an apologetic strain.

"A slight tax, certainly, is necessary," Fred replied; "one that will help support a force to preserve order and regularity in the mines, but not a tax that is large enough to support the whole government of Australia. Let a trifling sum be named, say a few shillings per man, per month, and exempt those from paying it who are sick, or unfortunate in their operations."

The lieutenant and inspector did not reply for some few moments. Each appeared to be pondering on the words that Fred had uttered, without knowing how to answer his arguments.

"At least," the lieutenant said, "we can trust our American friends, and therefore there is no occasion for our adjourning from these comfortable quarters."

We returned no answer, and he went on, unmindful of our presence.

"The governor and council have concluded that the miners have abused the government without cause, and that their rebellious attitude is of so hostile a nature that prompt action must be taken, as it is feared that, if the miners are allowed to continue in their present course, the colony will soon be in a state of revolt, and that independence will be declared. Therefore, to save the effusion of blood, and teach the miners that they must respect the laws, it is proposed to provoke a

collision, and shoot a few of the ringleaders; and after that is effected, peace and quietness will be restored."

"The governor and council are mad, if they expect to maintain peace by such means," Fred said; but no notice was taken of his remark.

"But the troops?" asked the inspector, anxiously.

"Will be on their way to Ballarat in less than a fortnight. Even now, munitions of war are packing, and wagons being got ready to forward stores, and accompany the soldiers on their march. Things are working so quietly and effectively that even the officers of the regiment are not aware that they are to leave Melbourne."

"And my instructions?" asked the inspector.

"To play the spy, as usual!" cried a gruff voice, within a few feet of us, on the outside of the building.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Catching a Tarl as well as a Cassiowary.

We started up in such surprise and rapidity, that the inspector stumbled and fell head foremost against Steel Spring, striking the latter full in his stomach, and sending him, like a cannon ball, out of the back entrance of the store amidst the horses, stabled there in company with Rover, for security.

Before the scamp could gain his feet, the dog, still entertaining a little animosity against his old enemy, flew at him, and with a vigorous bite tore off a portion of his pants, where they were the fullest, and then luckily desisted from further damage, probably not liking the taste.

"Some one has been listening!" exclaimed the lieutenant, rushing towards the front door, followed by the inspector and Fred, while I proceeded to the relief of Steel Spring, who made more noise than all the rest of us.

"There he goes — follow him!" shouted Murden, as a form was seen to run towards the river, although the night was too dark to distinguish who it was; and after running a few yards, the pursuers returned completely baffled, and bewildered at the turn affairs had taken.

"What is to be done now?" asked Mr. Brown, with a bewildered air.

"Vy, I shall have to get a new pair of pants, I s'pose," answered Steel Spring, who imagined that the conversation was addressed to him.

"Silence, you fool; we are in no humor for jesting," returned Mr. Brown, angrily.

"I don't think it any joke to have a big dog tear ye, and spile new clothes," Steel Spring muttered, although not loud enough for Mr. Brown to hear.

"Some person has overheard our plans, and the miners will be forewarned," Murden said. "Who would have supposed that an eavesdropper was concealed within hearing?"

"But what is to be done?" reiterated Mr. Brown.

"There is where I need advice myself," the lieutenant answered looking first upon Fred and then upon myself, as though desirous of our opinions.

There was an ominous pause, but at length Fred concluded to speak in relation to the matter, and his remarks were received with attention.

"This mining tax," he said, "is one that will have to be abolished before many months, because it is oppressive, and applies to all without distinction. The miner who digs his fifty pounds of nuggets per week, or the one who does not get gold enough to make a finger ring, are compelled to conform to the law; and as there are more blanks than prizes in this lottery — for gold digging is but a lottery — of course the poorer class feel that they are aggrieved, and desire an equalization law, so that a man can pay according to his earnings.

"As soon as a conflict does occur, the government will be defeated. It may not be in fighting battles, but it will be in public resentment. Let ten or a dozen miners be killed by the police or soldiers, and the governor-general and his council will be driven from the country by popular opinion.

"The mother country, as she valued her possession, would not dare to retain him or friends in office, for if they did, a revolution would be the consequence. With the retirement of the government, all those who had aided it would be compelled to leave, or all those who had taken a prominent part in the warfare against the miners. Therefore, if you desire to make Australia a home, don't be mixed up in the present struggle, if possible."

"I am half inclined to think that you are right," Murden said, at length.

"I also begin to think so," the inspector remarked.

"I've hall 'long hentertained similar hideas," Steel Spring said, but he was not attended to.

"But we are officers of the police force, and must respond when called for duty," the lieutenant observed.

"Granted," replied Fred; "but it is very easy to get exchanged, especially if the request is backed with a rare specimen nugget."

The two officers exchanged glances, and nodded acquiescence in the views promulgated.

"I think," Murden said, "that my time will be so occupied with affairs at Melbourne that I shall not be able to visit Ballarat again this year."

"And I have an intense desire to be near an uncle of mine in Sydney. Will you, Mr. Murden, forward my petition for an exchange?" asked the inspector, with a smile of great meaning.

"It will give me great pleasure to undertake the commission. I have heard of some very fine specimens of gold being taken from these mines," the lieutenant added.

"It will give me great satisfaction to forward two pieces that I owe to our worthy chief, and will you tell him that I anticipate obtaining a third piece after I am exchanged?"

"And what report had I better carry back to Melbourne?" the lieutenant asked.

"You can say that you gave me the necessary instructions, but there is no hope of coping with the miners unless five thousand troops, with cannon, are on the ground. That will startle government, you may depend," the inspector answered, earnestly.

"And let us keep our counsel. There is no need that we should inform our superiors that through our stupidity their well-laid plans have been destroyed, and the miners acquainted with what is in store for them. Eh, Mr. Brown?"

"Certainly not, sir," promptly responded that individual.

"Ve should lose our reputation for shrewdness if ve did," muttered Steel Spring, but his master overheard him, and gave him a kick as a reward.

And in this manner was it settled, that government should not be enlightened in regard to the information which the miners had obtained, and it was owing to the plot being overheard at our store that the people of Ballarat were enabled to abolish the odious mining tax, and to accomplish that, were prepared for the soldiers when they did arrive.

The inspector left us for his quarters, and the rest of us retired for the night, with the intention of rising early and riding out to meet Smith, who could not be more than ten miles distant, according to Murden's report.

We were on horseback about sunrise, and rode slowly out of Ballarat, leaving Steel Spring to look after the store and its effects. The miners were cooking their breakfasts as we passed along, and the fumes of fried pork and boiling coffee greeted our nostrils at every turn.

Stretched out as far as the eye could reach were tents of every color and hue, from the new comer of yesterday to the old stager blackened by the dust and rains of nearly twelve months. We met parties of Chinese, who had been on a hunt for lizards and other insects, and to judge from their jargon, they had been eminently successful.

Two of them were staggering under the weight of an enormous snake, that they had found dead a short distance from the town, and they strung it on a pole, and were congratulating themselves on the many stews that it would make. They regarded it in the light of a present from their gods, and danced with joy.

We left the main road, and followed an almost imperceptible trail that led us in a parallel course, and within sight of the road that we expected Smith would choose for reaching the town. By doing so we were enabled to avoid the dust and confusion, and ride more at our leisure; and before we were five miles from Ballarat we were repaid for our precaution, for just as we were passing a small clump of half-stunted vegetation we heard a fluttering of wings, and on looking up, we saw one of the largest birds that Australia can boast. It was a full-grown cassiowary, and stood nearly eight feet high, we judged, with long, stout legs, black and muscular, and a foot that would cover a peck measure.

The bird's beak was like an ostrich's, stout and sharp, and its head and body greatly resembled one. The cassiowary's wings were also small, and seemed as though intended to help its progress when running; for it was impossible to lift its huge body into the air with such puny ones.

The bird did not seem much alarmed at our presence, and by keeping

Rover at our sides, we were enabled to examine it at leisure. After first stretching out its long neck, and uttering a peculiar whistle, the bird, after a second glance at us, continued to feed, and seemed disposed to let us continue our journey without further attention.

"It's a cassiowary," Murden said, in a low tone, "and I'll give five pounds for its skin. I never saw a live one before, although I have frequently seen the stuffed one at the government house, which is valued so highly by Sir Charles Latrobe. What a prize it would be, if we only had our rifles?"

The lieutenant was right; if we had only have taken our rifles with us, we could have killed the bird from where we stood; but the distance was too great to expect a fatal result with a revolver, and we knew that if we advanced nearer it would take to flight. If we went back to Ballarat after a rifle, it was not likely that the bird would stay there until we returned, and under these circumstances we looked towards Fred for his advice.

"Let us capture the bird alive," he said, and we laughed at his words, thinking that he meant to ridicule us.

"I am serious," he said, "for I believe that it is possible."

"Let us know how," cried Murden; "and if your plan succeeds, the best supper that can be obtained in Ballarat shall reward your ingenuity!"

"For how many?" inquired Fred.

"For the party, and Mr. Brown."

"That will cost you more than five pounds; but as you are anxious for the bird, I will try and devise a way of relieving your purse."

Fred, as he spoke, uncoiled his long halter, — a rope that we used to hitch the horses to during the daytime, so that they could wander over considerable ground, and feed upon the dried grass, — and made a running knot in one end, and thus formed a slip-noose, like the Mexican's *reatta*.

"What next?" we asked.

"Why, I want both of you to follow my example, and if you get near enough to the bird, to throw the rope over its neck, and see that one end of it is made fast to the pommel of the saddle."

"Why, that is the way that the Spaniards capture ostriches," Murden said.

"Precisely," returned Fred, "only they have to ride many miles over a sandy soil before the ostrich will consent to be taken; and it strikes me that we can imitate those same Spaniards, and even if we can't get near enough to cast our reattas we can try the effects of a shot."

"By George, I'm in for the sport!" cried Murden, and he commenced preparing his rope in a manner similar to Fred's.

In a few minutes we were ready, and rode off a short distance, and then gradually closed in until the unconscious bird was surrounded. I then allowed Rover to start, and with a low bay he dashed towards the cassiowary.

The latter, when the dog was within a few feet, stopped feeding, and seemed to be somewhat astonished; and just as the hound sprang upon his intended victim, the bird turned tail to, and started on a run, in the direction of Fred.

The animal made awful clumsy work of running, and yet it got over the ground in a surprisingly rapid manner; and although Rover exerted himself to the utmost, he had some difficulty in gaining on the chase.

We hallooed the hound on, in hopes that he would seize the bird by one of its legs; and in fact, just as he was about to, the cassiowary suddenly stopped, raised one of its huge feet, and with a vigorous kick sent Rover rolling head over heels.

The dog got up and looked somewhat astonished, and then recommenced the chase with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

The bird continued its irregular course, lifting its huge legs in a slow and mathematical manner, yet running with great speed, and seeming to care no more for bushes, and such like obstructions, than an elephant.

As I said before, the bird's course led directly towards Fred; but upon getting sight of him as he sat on his horse with rope in hand, it changed, and fled towards me, plunging its long neck, and uttering a short whistle, as though blowing off steam. Even while running, the short, stumpy wings were used to aid its flight and steady its body, which rocked, and rolled, and swayed to and fro like a ship in a head sea.

"On, Rover, on!" we shouted, and the faithful dog strained all of his energies to overtake the chase, and when he again got within a few yards of it, up went a claw, and we could hear the powerful blow that descended upon the dog's head, and sent him rolling over and over again, and this time a slight yelp told that he was somewhat hurt.

"Look out for him!" shouted Fred and Murden, spurring towards me, but there was no necessity to caution me. I had my rope all ready, and when the bird was near enough, I whirled it over my head *a la Mexicano*, and let it fly at the long neck that was stretched out to its fullest extent.

The cord fell directly upon the bird's body, but was shook clear in an instant, and its course was changed; and instead of seeking to pass me, it turned and ran towards the lieutenant, who was laughing most heartily at our attempts to imitate the cattle drivers of Spanish climes.

"Look out!" shouted Fred, but the warning was unheeded, and before the lieutenant could command his presence of mind the bird charged upon him, startled his horse, and the next moment the officer was thrown to the ground directly in the path of the cassiowary.

Luckily Murden struck the ground face downwards, and before he could turn over the bird was upon him. With one vigorous jerk of its beak on that portion of his anatomy where the flesh is supposed to be firmest, he tore away cloth, and perhaps an inch or two of skin; for at any rate we saw the lieutenant clap his hand upon his wound, and when he withdrew it, blood dripped from his fingers.

"D—n the cassiowary!" Murden roared, struggling to his feet, and rubbing his bruised limbs; but we did not stop to hear his complaints, for the bird was going off like a frightened deer, and if we expected to make a prize, there was no time to lose.

We struck our animals, and they followed the object of pursuit at the top of their speed, yet for the first five minutes we did not gain an inch; and even Rover, who had joined in the chase with renewed vigor found that he had got his match for once.

At length we got clear of the dried grass and bushes, and entered upon the prairie, that was as smooth and level as a house floor, and then we began to gradually gain upon the huge bird in spite of its immense strides.

Our course led directly towards the main road, and we could see a dozen teams leisurely pursuing their journey, and we hoped that the drivers would head the bird and cause it to turn towards us, when an opportunity would offer for a shot, for we began to give up all hope of making the capture alive.

We flew over the ground as fast as the horses could stretch, and the animals seemed to enjoy the sport equally as well as ourselves; in a few minutes we saw that the teamsters were watching the chase, and that a number of them had got their guns in readiness to give the bird a shot in case it went near enough to their carts. That was something that we did not desire, as we wished the honor of making the capture; and had we been disposed to trust to our revolvers, we could have wounded the bird when it unhorsed the lieutenant and left him sprawling in the dirt.

The eyes of the cassiowary were as sharp, however, as our own, and seeing the danger in front, slackened its speed as though uncertain what to do, and we took advantage of the hesitancy to urge the pace of our horses to the utmost, and gained so rapidly that Fred determined to try his reatta. He whirled it over his head in true Mexican style, and threw it, but the Mexican science was not in the act; it struck upon the bird's back, and then slipped to the ground.

Nothing daunted, Fred gathered up his rope again, and by the time that it was in his hand the chase suddenly stopped, raised its long neck, and attempted to pass between us, and again seek refuge amidst the grass that was growing in profusion on our right.

That act was fatal to the poor bird, for before it could gain headway Rover had caught one of its long legs in his mouth and bit so hard that a shrill shriek was elicited — something like the cry of an enraged ape. Again did the bird strike him with beak and claw, but the dog held on with the tenacity of a death-grip; and during the struggle we rode quickly up and threw our slip-nooses over that long neck, which had cut through the air with more than railroad speed. Even then, the cassiowary seemed to be more concerned about Rover than ourselves, and fought him fiercely.

"Call off the dog," shouted Fred; "we have him sure, now."

That was a task of some difficulty, for Rover had got his blood up and was fighting desperately, making the feathers fly in all directions; and even his antagonist was using all the weapons that nature had given him, and was striking out like a prize-fighter, fighting with wings and beak, and sometimes with feet, in a manner that would have excited the admiration of a cock-fighting padre.

By the time that I got Rover to relinquish the combat, — and during its continuance I did not escape harmless, — the teamsters had stopped their oxen and were rushing towards us, anxious to see what kind of an animal we were struggling with. The bird made frantic efforts to escape, but by means of the rope we were enabled to frustrate them, and were getting him quite subdued when the crowd reached us.

"What on airth is that?" inquired a man, whose voice readily proclaimed his nation.

"Why, that is an Australian turkey," replied Murden, who joined us at that instant, looking somewhat the worse for his trip, and we noticed that his seat in the saddle was not very firm.

"Why, you don't say that, 'squire?" asked our new acquaintance, approaching the captive to get a nearer view.

"Yes, it is. We pasture them out a little ways, and when the people at Ballarat feel like having a feast we catch one, but sometimes they get a little wild."

"Wall, I swow to man, if that don't beat all that I ever heard of, and no mistake. I've seen big cock-turkeys, and uncle Josiah raised one for last Thanksgiving that was a whopper, but this knocks him. I say, what could I get a pair of these 'ere for?"

The stranger very imprudently laid his hand upon the bird for the purpose of feeling his condition, and what proportion of flesh there was to feathers. Hardly had the captive felt his touch when all of his native fierceness returned, and while our countryman, with a grave face, was still expressing his wonder, the cassiowary raised one of his muscular legs and kicked him full on his breast. In another instant the American was going backward at a rapid rate, and finally brought up full length upon the earth. For a second he didn't move, then slowly gathering up his lank form, he looked first at the cassiowary, and then at Murden, and muttered, —

"Dod rot yer Australia turkeys, — they don't know manners."

The crowd roared with laughter, and for a long time our American friend was known by the nickname of "Turkey Johnson."

CHAPTER L.

Arrival of Smith. — Attempt to burn the Store.

Even after we had captured the cassiowary we did not know what to do with it, as Murden would not listen for a moment to the idea of its being killed, and yet the bird was too formidable an opponent to play with. While we were debating how to get the bird to Ballarat, an old stockman, who upon the discovery of gold had left his employment and gone into the teaming business, suggested that we should tie a handkerchief over his head, and guaranteed that we would then lead as docile as a pet lamb.

"Now, then, how are we to improve the advice of the stockman?" asked Murden. "Who will throw a handkerchief over the bird's head, and then have the hardihood to tie it?"

No one volunteered to perform so perilous a duty until our American friend, who had recovered from the effects of his kick, suggested that all present should take hold of the two ropes, and by pulling in oppo-

site directions manage to keep the bird in a state of strangulation that would utterly prevent all resistance.

Murden was delighted with the hint, and acted on it without delay. We pressed those present into service, and in a few minutes the eyes of the huge bird were screened from the light, and he was ready to follow us wherever we should lead. In this way we escorted him to town, and Murden, when he returned to Melbourne, carried his pet; and the bird may be alive now for all that I know, for the lieutenant gave him to the governor-general, and for many months after the presentation the cassiowary was to be seen on the grounds, near the palace, an object of great curiosity to all new-comers.

After seeing the bird safely housed at the back part of our store, where we kept our horses, and after astonishing Steel Spring by telling him that he was to make his entree into Melbourne on the back of the bird, we again took the road, and were soon gratified by meeting our partner, Smith, with two huge loads of merchandise of all descriptions, and each drawn by four yokes of oxen.

"Well, I've got along," he said, with one of his most cheerful smiles, "and a precious whack of itself I've got piled on the carts. Here's a little of every thing. Cheap for cash, you know."

"Then you made good trades in Melbourne?" we both demanded.

"I should rather think I had. There's three or four American clipper ships in port with cargoes that must be sold, and no demand. I bought a lot of stuff at auction, and I never paid such a low figure before."

"But how did you manage to get clear of your wife so soon after marriage?" Fred asked.

"Ah, I see that the lieutenant has been giving you the news," replied Smith, with a genuine blush. "Well, the fact of it is, she is too sensible a woman to regret the absence of one whom she knows is bettering himself, so that there were but few tears shed between us."

The lieutenant, with a consideration that did him credit, rode in advance a few rods, out of hearing, as he rightly judged that we must desire to make a few inquiries of a private nature respecting our business relation.

"Did you get the gold that was in the custody of the old ——"

We were about to say "old convict," when we recollected that he was Smith's father-in-law.

"Of course I did," our partner interrupted, apparently taking no notice of our mistake. "He read the order over a dozen times, and then made me sign a paper, stating that the money was given up to me on such a day, at such a time, and then called his daughter to witness the delivery. He wished you both all manner of prosperity, and said that he didn't want you to think hard of him for not letting you mine on his claim, but hoped to be rich enough before many days to relinquish it entirely, and then you could come and be welcome."

"Tell him we appreciate his kindness," returned Fred, with a laugh at the shrewdness of the old fox.

"Yes, I will," returned Smith, seriously. "But let me finish with an account of how I spent a portion of the funds, and what I did with the remainder. I have ten barrels of flour, or a ton as we term it, which I got cheap enough, and if we don't realize a profit on it I shall be much

mistaken — then I have sugars, molasses, whiskey, wine, spices, boots and shoes, clothing, meal, preserved meats and vegetables, tobacco and cigars, pipes, pork, a cask of vinegar, a barrel of pickles, firkins of butter, and a dozen cheeses, and fifty other things that I don't recollect, but which I have no doubt will meet with a ready sale after we have once got started."

"And the price for all these things was low?" we asked, quite amazed at the variety that our partner had selected.

"So low that over two thirds of the money that we subscribed now awaits our order at the Melbourne bank." And to confirm his words, Smith pulled from his bosom a small pouch that contained a certificate of deposit.

Of course we congratulated our friend on the prospect that he had afforded us of making a large percentage on his purchases, and by the time that we had finished our interrogations we had reached Ballarat and drew up in front of our new store; and in spite of the warmth of the afternoon, we stripped off our coats, and went to work unloading the carts and arranging the goods to suit our ideas of convenience and display.

Even Murden did not disdain to lend a hand, and Mr. Brown, when he dropped around to take a cup of tea with us in the evening, finding that there was plenty of work to be done, sent us half a dozen policemen; the latter labored as though they liked it, and when, about ten o'clock in the evening, we knocked off, and offered to pay them, to our surprise they told us that they were already paid, and all our entreaties were powerless to make them accept of a shilling. But they still lingered in the store, and we wondered at it; and at length we hinted to Murden that we thought they wanted something for their services, although they had refused money.

"Leave them to me," the lieutenant replied, "and I will find out what they expect."

"Well, boys, we have had a pretty hard evening's work," the lieutenant said, speaking to the men, who had no idea that he belonged to the service.

"Yes, sir; carrying in the barrels is apt to make one dry and tired," replied the men.

"Yes, I know; but you understand that there is no such thing as liquor in the store," and Murden winked mysteriously.

"O, we knew there was none," cried the men, with wonderful unanimity, and their faces experienced a change for the better immediately.

"I suppose if there was liquor here, and it was offered, you could take off half a tumbler full without much trouble?"

The men were confident that they could, although they once more expressed their full conviction in none being in the store.

"Tap a barrel and give them a strong pull at it," Murden whispered, "and you need not fear of their informing."

It was but the work of a moment to accomplish the object, and perhaps we were the more ready from a desire on our part to taste what Smith had bought. The six policemen threw back their heads with military precision, and emptied their tumblers without making even a

wry face; but their lips smacked like the reports of six distinct pistols, and as they turned to go one said, —

"Liquor is not allowed to be sold at the mines without a ful license, and the rules and regulations prevent us from touching any kind of spirits; therefore we are all temperance men; but I must say that you have got some of the best colored water to be had in the country. Good evening, sirs; we should like to assist again when our services are needed;" and off went the policemen, well satisfied with their reward.

It was as the men stated — liquor had to be licensed or not at all; and although a large amount was disposed of daily at Ballarat, yet it was never sold in the presence of a policeman, or a person who would be likely to inform of the vender.

We ate our supper with a good appetite, glancing with pride upon our well-filled store and carefully-selected goods, and bright anticipations arose in our minds as we thought of the profits that we should reach before they were all disposed of. A fortune of colossal size seemed within our reach, and only required a little tact to grasp. While we were thus cogitating, a barefooted, wild-looking boy, who seemed as though he had worked under ground all his life, and was only on the surface for a few minutes for the sake of astonishing civilization, made his appearance, threw down a dirty-looking note, and then disappeared as suddenly as he came.

"What does the fellow mean?" asked Murden, who was lazily swinging in a hammock, smoking a pipe with infinite relish, and endeavoring to keep the insects at bay by raising clouds of burnt tobacco.

"We are as much in the dark as yourself," I replied, examining the superscription of the letter, and finding that the address was to the "Two Americans, who keep the store."

"Well, open it and enlighten us," the lieutenant said, carelessly, and we complied, and found that the contents were as follows: —

"BALRAT, AUSTRALE. — You felers is in danger and i wont to tel you of it, but i mustnt be seen round or i shal be spected and then no confidince will be plac in me, the felers round think you is agin um in the mining tack, but i say no, take care of your store to night, or you wil see the devil. no more now. A MAN YOU BENIFITTED ONE TIM."

"A pleasant kind of note, truly," remarked Murden, laying down his pipe; "and I don't believe that the writer of the letter had any idea of needlessly alarming you. He is evidently your friend, and would call and give you information were he not fearful of being suspected by his comrades."

"But what is this danger that we are threatened with?" queried Fred.

"I don't know, but it strikes me very forcibly that I have been the means of involving you in difficulty. The spy who overheard our plans last night has evidently reported that you are on the side of government, and to vent their spite against you is undoubtedly the object of the disaffected miners. What they intend to do I don't know; but this I do know — I will have every policeman in Ballarat stationed around your store before it shall come to harm, and I will lose my own life but I will preserve yours and your property."

Murden spoke with an air of sincerity and confidence that convinced us he was in earnest.

"Our property," repeated Fred, in a musing tone, and he glanced around the store, where bale and cask were strewed in confusion.

"That is what is aimed at," cried my friend, suddenly starting up. "Depend upon it, the villains mean to fire the store and destroy all the goods that we have purchased at such a large expense. But we will be ready for them."

He drew his revolver from his belt and examined carefully each barrel, and then saw that the caps were fresh and fitted well.

"In that they shall be disappointed," Murden exclaimed; "I will go to the police quarters at once and state the facts of the case. A dozen men shall be detailed to guard your store, day and night, until all danger is past."

The impetuous officer, filled with this idea, would have rushed instantly to the inspector's; and before Fred could stop him he had got into the street.

"Come here for a moment," cried Fred, in a quiet tone, and Murden doggedly consented.

The instant that he was in the store Fred closed the door and locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"What is it you wish?" asked the lieutenant, after a moment's silence, surprised at the act.

"I wish you to hear a little reason, and not ruin us with your good intentions," my friend answered, quietly.

Murden looked astonished, but made no reply. He refilled his pipe and lighted it in silence. At length he asked, —

"What do you mean by saying that I shall ruin you with my intentions? Do you think that I do not feel very keenly the situation in which my own thoughtlessness has placed you?"

"We have no doubt that your motives are good," replied Fred, "but we know that you will listen to reason, and after a few words of explanation will agree with us that our course is right."

Murden looked incredulous, and puffed away at his pipe vigorously; but he muttered, "Go on," and we discovered that he was softening rapidly.

"It is evident," Fred went on to state, "that the disaffected portion of the miners at this place think that we are in league with government in endeavoring to force the tax upon them, and, to revenge themselves, undertake to burn our store. This we must prevent."

"That is what I told you in the first place," interrupted the lieutenant. "We must have a police force around the store, and shoot down every suspicious character that approaches during the night."

"Such a course would soon make the mines too hot to hold us, and instead of getting sympathy, we should get the undying hatred of every man in Australia. No, no; we must meet violence with kindness, and instead of making enemies, make friends."

"Go on, and tell me how you will act to do so," cried Murden.

"It is very simple: we must watch for those who seek to harm us, and convince them of our friendship," responded Fred, earnestly.

"By hanging or shooting, I suppose," replied Murden.

"Neither one nor the other method should we adopt. We will keep watch, and if an incendiary seeks to fire our building, we will seize him, and convince him that we are favorable to his cause, or that we mean to remain neutral during the coming struggle, and then set him free to return to his friends with the news."

"Hadn't you better throw in a glass of liquor, and a few plugs of tobacco?" asked the officer, sarcastically, never having heard of such kind of treatment to people who were disposed to be vicious.

"Your suggestion is good, and shall be acted on," replied Fred, pleasantly. "Have you any other?"

"No, but I wish to tell you that you are laboring under a mistaken idea, and that you will regret your benevolent motives. Such a course as you describe might answer very well if the population of Ballarat was made up of high-minded and honorable men, and not the refuse of the old countries, whose crimes have outlawed them, and whose greatest inclination is to be in mischief."

"You forget," said Fred, "that this tax movement originated with the best and most intelligent men at the mines, and that the class of people you have described are bushrangers, or else men who live upon the community without work. If ever the miners and the government do have a collision, you will be surprised at the respectable ranks that the former will show."

"I have no doubt of it," responded Murden, dryly.

"Under these circumstances, we must think that it is better to depend upon ourselves than upon the police for protection, because the instant that the latter are arrayed on our side it will be known all over Ballarat, and then our business and reputation will be lost."

"Then you are really serious?" queried Murden, after a moment's thought.

"Quite so, for it is our only hope to escape persecution," returned Fred.

"Well, perhaps you are right," the officer said, "and I will consent to follow your suggestions; but I claim the privilege of assisting you in your watch."

"That we are quite willing to accord, and as it is past twelve o'clock we may as well begin it, for there is no knowing how soon our enemies may steal upon us."

To prevent the dog from giving an alarm we tied him up, and then extinguished our lights, and carefully walked around the building, keeping well in the shade, so that if any one was approaching we could be informed of the fact, and be prepared to give a warm reception. The night was very quiet and warm, and the only sounds to be heard were the humming of the thousands of insects that filled the air, or an occasional howling of some dog, tied up during the temporary absence of its owner, or the loud snoring of Steel Spring, who, taking but little interest in matters that did not concern his stomach or himself, went to sleep at an early hour in the evening with his head resting on a herring box, and his long legs on a barrel, and such doleful sounds did he emit from his nasal organ, that even the horses were kept in a state of perpetual irritation, and were inclined to refuse their provender. Occasionally on the heavy night air would come a dull sound, like a splash of

water, which showed that some industrious miners were trying to keep their claim clear, and for that purpose were bailing out water day and night.

Twice did we patrol around our store, and yet saw nothing of danger or any suspicious circumstance. Hour after hour passed away, and we began to grow dozy from the effect of a hard day's work, and we sat down within the building, and thought that we would refresh ourselves with a few whiffs from our pipes; but while filling them, a low growl from Rover startled us. In an instant I was by the dog's side, and quieted him with a word, and during all the confusion that ensued that night, the hound did not disgrace his training.

The sound that had started the dog appeared to us to proceed from a tent some distance off; but we were not certain in that respect, and listened attentively. For a few minutes all was quiet, and then we distinctly heard the cracking of a stick, and then all was still for the space of five minutes.

We cautiously moved, so that we could observe every portion of the building, and yet we saw nothing that deserved notice, and we began to think that our imaginations were running riot, when a repetition of the cracking sound once more occurred.

"Some one is under the building," whispered Fred.

Our store rested upon two small hillocks, which was an advantage during the wet season, for the water was all carried off towards the river, and the constructor of the store had rightly judged that it would flow under the building, and leave the front part perfectly dry. It was, therefore, very easy for one or more persons to crawl along the rough gulf which the water coursed over, and stopping under the former, kindle a fire that would give us great difficulty to extinguish in the absence of engines and scarcity of water.

We all listened attentively, but no sound was heard, and we began to fear that the flames might already be kindled, and that the incendiaries had made their escape. Smith and Murden agreed to creep down one side of the building, while Fred and myself undertook to guard the other.

With this understanding we parted company, and cautiously reached the gulf, so that we could look under the building, and there, sure enough, we saw that ample preparations had been made for smoking us out, for a pile of kindling nearly a foot high was raised, and two men, who, when they spoke, did so in whispers, were busy adding to it.

"There, there's enough," cried one, "to set fire to all the shanties in Ballarat. Light the match, and let's be off, or the dog will be snuffing around, and then we shall have the fellers about our ears."

"Faith, there's mighty little fear of that, for don't you hear 'um snore as though they hadn't slept a bit for a month. Pile on the stuff, and let's have a rousing fire while we are 'bout it," replied the other; and his voice sounded familiar to us, although who the speaker was we had no idea.

"You forget that firewood is dear at Ballarat," and he chuckled as he spoke, as though amused at the thought.

"Thin we'll have it chaper before long," returned the other; and by his language we knew that he was an Irishman.

They worked for a few seconds, and after a match was lighted and thrust into the pile of kindlings, and then the incendiaries crawled towards us as fast as possible, for the purpose of escaping, and getting clear of the flames, which already began to shoot up and crackle, as they gathered headway.

CHAPTER LI.

Attempt to burn the Store.

As the heads of the incendiaries emerged from beneath the building, and even before they had time to gain a footing, we threw ourselves upon them, and pinned them to the earth in despite of the powerful struggles which they made to escape; failing in which, their hands sought for their knives, but we saw the movement, and succeeded in defeating it.

"Yield in peace," cried Fred, "or you will fare worse," addressing his antagonist, the Irishman, who replied with an oath, and a fierce thrust of a long knife.

"Is that your gratitude?" continued Fred, who easily avoided the meditated blow. "Then I will begin in earnest."

He drew his revolver from his pocket, and struck his opponent a heavy blow on his temple. The Irishman uttered a groan, and remained motionless, and then Fred rushed towards me to see what assistance I needed; but I fortunately required none, for the man I had taken charge of, after being frustrated in his attempt to use his knife, remained perfectly quiet, and appeared disposed to surrender on as good terms as he could make.

"Never mind me," I cried, as Fred joined me; "I will take charge of this fellow, and blow his brains out if he makes an attempt to escape. Extinguish the fire before it gains headway, and don't, above all things, raise an alarm."

Fred crawled under the building, and in a few seconds had scattered the firebrands so that all danger was passed, and in the latter work Smith and Murden rendered good service; for the lieutenant quickly had a couple of buckets of water on hand, which he had brought from our "sink hole," and in a very few minutes all traces of the fire were destroyed.

"Have you got the scamp?" asked Murden, crawling from his confined quarters, where he had been nearly strangled with smoke.

"This fellow appears to be quiet enough," I answered, turning my prisoner over on his back, so that I could see his face.

"Is he?" asked the fellow in a sarcastic tone; and quick as lightning he started to his feet, and I saw a long knife flash in the starlight, and before I could spring aside he aimed it full at my breast.

In another instant I should have been a dead man, but, fortunately, Murden saw the move, and struck the ruffian's arm up, and the knife

passed over my shoulder harmless. The next instant my prisoner was measuring his length on the hard ground, with blood spirting from his nose and mouth, the effects of a tremendous blow, which the lieutenant delivered full upon his unprotected face.

"Lie there, you d——d midnight incendiary," cried the officer, indignant to think that he wished to add murder to his other crimes.

The wretch only groaned in reply; but Murden, thinking that he was shamming, slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, and then served the Irishman, whom Fred had rendered tongue-tied by a blow from his revolver, in the same manner.

"A neat pair of handcuffs is an ornament that disgraces no one, while they add to a person's security eighty per cent. There is, to be sure, a slight prejudice against having them on in unmixed company, but it is astonishing how soon the feeling wears off. Next to a good revolver, believe me, a pair of handcuffs is a policeman's best friend."

While the lieutenant was speaking, he gave the prostrate Irishman a kick with his heavy boot, as an illustration of his argument perhaps, and the blow was sufficient to restore the fellow to his senses.

"Holy St. Patrick, it's murdering me, ye are," he exclaimed.

"No, but we intend to, unless you inform us who hired you to set fire to our store," rejoined Fred.

The fellow maintained a profound silence, and Murden was about to repeat his blow when Fred checked him.

"No more kicks," he said; "they have been punished sufficiently already, and we must now try what effect kindness will have on them."

"I'll try the effect of a stout halter," cried the angry officer; but Fred was resolute, and refused to allow them to be punished.

Our prisoners listened to the words that passed between the lieutenant and Fred, and I could see by the bright starlight that astonishment was plainly visible upon their faces. It was evident that they expected different treatment.

"Let us take them into the store, and there we can examine them at leisure," Fred said; and as the idea met our approval, we helped them to stand upon their feet, and then escorted them into the building, where we lighted our candles, and after wiping some of the congealed blood from their faces, we examined their countenances to see if we had ever met them before in Ballarat.

"Where have we seen you before?" Fred asked, addressing the Irishman.

The man hung his head and refused to reply; and he even appeared to act as though ashamed of his conduct.

"I can tell you where we have met him before," I remarked. "Don't you remember the Irishman whose wounds you dressed on the second night of your arrival, and who swore that he would yet live to reward you?"

Fred nodded, and his face grew dark with passion.

"Well, this is the person. He was destitute of money and credit, and to save his life we spent many hours in cleansing his injuries, and dressing them with care. He has already attempted to pay us his debt of gratitude, and perhaps when he is again sick he will visit us."

"You miserable apology for a man," cried Murden, raising his arm, and the fellow cowered at the threatened blow; but Fred interposed, and stopped the impetuous officer from carrying his intention into effect.

"What excuse have you to offer for plotting against us?" demanded Fred, addressing the Irishman.

"I was poor, and wanted food," he returned, with a face of shame.

"Why did you not come to me, and I would have supplied your wants? It is but a poor return to attempt to burn us out for the attention that we showed you. Is your heart made of stone?"

"I was told that you two was plotting agin the miners concerning the tax, and that it would be a good thing to ruin ye, and make ye lave the country," answered the Irishman, not daring to raise his downcast glances from the floor.

"And the miners hired both of you to commence the war of burning, did they?" asked Fred.

"No, not the miners," returned the man, "although they think that you is agin 'um, and that you had better move. A man, whose name we don't know, gave us five pounds to set the place on fire."

"You are lying, and we know it," retorted Fred. "Tell us who paid you the money, or you will fare badly," he continued, in a stern tone of voice.

The incendiary stammered, and looked towards his accomplice, as though uncertain what to say, and while hesitating, the latter exclaimed:

"It is useless to mince matters, Pat — we are in a fix, and have got to make the most of it. We belong to a secret league, whose object is to resist paying the taxes imposed by government upon miners, and hearing that you were with the government, we determined to clip your claws, and prevent you from doing mischief. If your store had taken fire, we might have made a few pounds by plunder, but as for receiving five pounds, or any money for the work, it's all sham, and Pat knows it. We talked the matter over with a dozen or so, and agreed to do the business. That's all about it, and you may make the most of it, and hand us over to the police as soon as you please."

The ruffian spoke in as free and easy a manner as though he had been engaged in some meritorious work, instead of a piece of black villany.

"You did not know, then, that we were opposed to the government on the tax question, and that while we determined to take no part in the struggle, we sympathized with the miners?" inquired Fred.

"One of the men to whom we talked said as much," answered the fellow, "but we did not pay any attention to him, and neither do I believe it now."

"Then let this convince you," exclaimed Fred, taking the key of the irons from Murden's hand, and unlocking the handcuffs. "There, you are free. Go and tell the dissatisfied miners that we will never plot against them, although it is probable that we shall not take up arms in their defence. We are traders, and have done with fighting, and wish to remain neutral."

The fellows stared in unfeigned astonishment at Fred, and then around the store, as though hardly convinced that they had heard the welcome intelligence.

"Is your honor serious?" asked the Irishman.

"Quite so — go; but if another attempt is made to burn us out, we have weapons that we know how to use. Say so to those with whom you plotted."

"I won't say that I'm sorry for what I've done, 'cos no great harm has happened any how," said the Englishman, who appeared to possess more of an education than his companion; "but I'll say this — had we burned your store down, and then learned that you was not agin us, I should have felt bad, and would have tried to right it in some way. We are poor devils at best, and ain't got much in common, but we are all liable to make mistakes, and so we supposed that we were really doing something for the cause."

"It's little I thought it was ye," said the Irishman, who seemed determined also to offer an excuse. "Faith, had I known it was the two rael gintlemen who healed me sores, it's little I'd thought of setting ye on fire. Long lives to ye, and don't be afraid of bad luck after this. It's Paddy O'Shea who will fight for ye to the longest day that he lives."

We received the apologies with due dignity, and without placing too much stress upon what was said by the men; and at last they concluded to take their departure, but just as they got to the door, and while Fred was unlocking it, O'Shea expressed a desire to whisper a few words to my friend.

"If ye have such a thing as a thimble full of whiskey in the store, perhaps ye will give us a drink?" he said.

Fred hesitated for a moment, but at last concluded that it would be a cheap riddance by giving them a drink. He drew a couple of stiff glasses from the barrel, and they swallowed the liquor with a relish that would have delighted the heart of a manufacturer.

"Ah, how I should like to drink such stuff as that all day, and have nothing to do!" cried Pat; and he glanced fondly towards the barrel, as though anticipating another invitation, but he didn't get it.

They still hesitated about going, and the two villains looked first at one and then at another, as though they still had a matter that they wished to speak about.

"I also have a request," whispered the Englishman, evidently mistaking his man, and thinking that Fred was a good-natured sort of person, who would comply with every wish.

"Name it," replied Fred, with some little impatience.

"Could you lend me ten pounds for a few days, until I can collect a few debts that are due me?" the scamp asked.

"No, I can't do that," rejoined Fred, opening wide the store door, "but I can let you have a few of these if they will suit you."

He raised his foot as he spoke, and administered a few energetic kicks to the fellow's posteriors, that almost took him off his feet.

"They fit well enough," cried the beggar, "but they don't suit;" and the twain were speedily out of sight, and whenever we used to see them afterwards, they would keep at a respectable distance, and look to see what kind of boots we wore.

As we apprehended no further difficulty that night, we went to bed, and got quite a comfortable nap before sunrise.

Murden, whose visit extended a day or two longer than he intended, got ready to start in the afternoon, and although he had only brought a valise with him, and a change of clothing, yet did he pretend, every time that his departure was mentioned, that he had to pack his things, and away he would go, and remain absent until he had recovered composure sufficient to face us like a man, and without a display of weakness.

With a hearty shake of our hands, and a troubled brow, Murden left us; and had he not undertaken the difficult task of driving or leading his newly-caught bird, the cassiowary, which gave him trouble, and required all of his attention, he would have broken down in his leave-taking, and galloped off without daring to trust himself with words.

As for Steel Spring, he appeared delighted at the idea of leaving; for he was fond of change, and required exciting scenes to keep him out of mischief, which he was prone to, in defiance of the vigilant eye that Murden kept on him; and I had but little doubt, as I stood and watched their forms disappear amidst a labyrinth of tents and crazy huts, that the long-limbed wretch would have murdered him, and rejoined a gang of bushrangers, had it not been for a sort of moral fear that prevented him from committing the crime.

We felt lonely for the balance of the day, although we were extremely busy in arranging our goods, and in selling. Our store was crowded from noon until long past sunset, and then we were compelled to close and exclude the crowd, owing to our being completely exhausted, both mentally and physically, for the adding up of figures was a new kind of brain work, that had not tasked us since the days when we were schoolboys.

How many "nigger heads" we sold that day, singly, for the purpose of allowing the miners to taste our stock before they bought largely, I have no means of knowing; but fortunately for our reputation, Smith had displayed great prudence in his bargains, and his "cavendish" and "fine cut" were at length pronounced the best that were ever brought to Ballarat, and so we got up a great sale of tobacco, and our stock ran low before we had been open a week.

Smith, and the man he had hired to freight goods, remained with us three days, and then returned, in all haste, to Melbourne for more goods, for our run of custom was so great that we found that a fresh supply of articles was needed without delay. Our partner did not need urging to return to the city, for the reader will recollect that he was recently married, and that his wife was at Melbourne.

We found, when he got ready to start, that we had taken gold dust enough to pay for our next cargo, even without drawing on our reserve fund, which was held subject to our order in a Melbourne bank.

We were sitting in our store one evening, smoking our pipes, as usual, and talking over the business of the day, when we heard a knock at the door, light and timid, as though delivered by the hand of a woman.

It was long past the hour of our closing, and we had made preparations for retiring for the night, for our hammocks were slung, and ready for occupancy, and it was seldom that we had a visitor at so late an hour. The knock started us, and even Rover, who had been sleeping soundly,

awoke with a growl, as though he scented danger, and was going to be prepared to meet it.

"Who can that be?" asked Fred, involuntarily placing his hand upon his revolver.

I was unable to answer the question, of course; but we waited in silence for a repetition of the knocking with as much anxiety as though it had been a summons of instant execution.

There was a secret gang of ruffians in Ballarat at that time, and in defiance of the vigilance of the police, they had committed many bold robberies, and even murders; and the stories told of their atrocities had awakened a feeling in our hearts that perhaps some night the villains might undertake an attack upon ourselves, knowing, as they must, that our sales were large, and that we must have considerable money on hand, which we did not deposit at the government office, for the purpose of being sent to Melbourne under military escort.

Every night, since we had grown in importance and wealth, we had slept with our revolvers under our heads, and beneath our pillows were small bags of gold dust, and gold and silver coin; and when men begin to collect riches, they will defend them and watch over them with more tenderness than any thing else that they possess.

Again we heard the knock upon our door, and, we thought, a low groan; but it might have been the wind. The hound was snuffing at the door, and uttered a low wail, as though mourning for the dead. Two or three times he trotted towards us, and then returned and scratched at the woodwork with his claws, as though anxious to get into the street.

"I can stand this no longer!" cried Fred, cocking his revolver, and starting up. "I will see who is at the door if a dozen robbers are waiting outside."

He started towards the door as he spoke, and I followed him. Just as we were about to draw the bolts, another knock, but much fainter, and a low, death-like groan, fell upon our ears.

We started, and hesitated about proceeding; but Rover looked up into our faces with such an expression, as though to encourage us to see what the matter was, that we determined to investigate, and no longer suspect a trick.

We withdrew the bolts and suddenly threw open the door, and as we did so, the body of a man fell inward, and lay at our feet motionless, although by our lights, dim as they were, we could see that our midnight visitor was covered with blood.

CHAPTER LII.

The Attempt to murder Mr. Critchet.

We were surprised and somewhat startled at the intrusion, but we did not stop to exchange surmises, or to ask questions. A man was lying at our feet, badly wounded, and was bleeding freely from half a dozen cuts or stabs.

We considered that our first duty was to attend to him, and defend him, if necessary, from a fresh attack of assailants, and that after his wounds were dressed, and he was able to answer questions, then we could investigate the circumstances connected with his mysterious appearance at our door, and, if possible, bring to justice the perpetrators of the wrong.

Before we moved the now insensible body, we looked out and endeavored to discover if persons were loitering near; but all was quiet, and not a soul was to be seen. We hastily closed the door and bolted it, and then moved the wounded man to a mattress that we kept for Smith to sleep upon when he was with us, and as we did so, and the light fell upon his features, we were surprised to discover that our visitor was our nearest neighbor, an elderly Englishman by the name of Critchet, who, in company with his nephew, a young fellow of dissipated habits, was working a mine about a quarter of a mile from our store. The young man's name was Follet; and while we had never had any conversation with him, excepting while selling a few articles which he required from the store, we had taken a strong prejudice against him, although upon what ground we could not really tell.

He was one of those kind of men who never look you full in the face while speaking, and if indeed you caught his eye, it was only for the sixteenth part of a second, and by accident at that. He had the name of being a desperate gambler, and once Mr. Brown had called our attention to him, and remarked that he had lost more money at card playing than he made honestly, and wondered if his uncle supplied his extravagances.

The latter owned the claim which he was working, and employed the nephew at a fair salary, and that was all that we knew of the connection between them, excepting that we had seen them talking together in an excited manner quite frequently, and only the day before we had heard them quarrel on some subject that we did not care to listen to, for it did not concern us.

Report had often reached our ears that Mr. Critchet had made quite a fortune with his claim, and that he was very prudent in his expenditures; but as he had never disputed our prices, and paid what we demanded without a word of complaint, we placed no reliance upon the assertions.

After our first expression of astonishment was over, we set to work without delay to ascertain what injuries the old man had sustained. We removed his vest and shirt, and found a small cut near the region

of his heart; but upon probing the wound we found that the blow, evidently intended to be a fatal one, had been misdirected; that a rib had received the point of the knife, and saved the old man from instant death.

A further examination revealed two more stabs, one on the right shoulder and the other on the left breast, both of which were bleeding profusely, and had so weakened the old man that he fainted the instant he found that he was likely to receive assistance.

We went to work and cleansed the wounds of blood, and then stopped the bleeding by applying balsam and lint freely, and over all we put pieces of adhesive plaster, which we had used before for cuts, and found very efficacious.

In the present instance it served to keep the lint in its place, and I have no doubt that it was mainly instrumental in saving the life of Mr. Critchet, for it prevented the insects from irritating the wounds and causing inflammation.

A dose of weak wine was poured down our patient's throat, and then we sat by his side until morning, before he recovered his consciousness, and was able to speak.

"I've foiled the young scamp," he muttered, as he looked around the store, and then suffered his glance to rest upon our faces. "He thought that he could get the old miner's dust; but he missed his aim, and I shall yet live to punish him."

"Of whom do you speak?" I asked, bending over his form so that I could hear him more distinctly, for he spoke rather low and incoherently.

"There were two of them," the old miner continued, not noticing my interrogation; "I know there were two of them, because I could hear them whisper, and feel for the gold; but I cheated them, and shall live."

The old man attempted to laugh, but the effort sounded like a death-rattle, it was so faint.

"You must not talk now," Fred said, "but save your strength, and in a few days we hope you will be quite well. Sleep if you can, and in the mean time we will send you a physician."

"No, no," our patient exclaimed, hurriedly; "I want no meddlesome quack near me, with his solemn face and pretended knowledge. There is not a doctor in Ballarat that I would trust with my life. Besides, they are so expensive, and where is the money to come from to pay a physician's bills?"

"We will be responsible for his bill," rejoined Fred, soothingly. "You have been grievously hurt, and need better attention than we can give you."

"But I say no," reiterated Mr. Critchet; "I shall get well, and to you alone will the praise be due. And hark ye, young men! don't be too forward hereafter in volunteering to assume another's debts. You may live to repent it. Now let me rest for an hour or two, and when I awake I think that I shall feel stronger."

The old man, who spoke with a sort of dictatorial officiousness, as though he had been accustomed to command all his lifetime, closed his eyes, and in a few minutes was in a troubled sleep; and as he did not require the services of both of us to attend him, I went to bed, and left Fred watching by his side, with the understanding that I was to be

called at daylight, so that I could relieve him and let him obtain a few hours' rest, which he very much needed.

Fred called me at the specified time, but our patient, instead of being better, was much worse, and was laboring under the effects of a high fever. A dozen times he attempted to leave his bed, and as often did I restrain him, and soothe him with kind words, until at length, just before daylight, I recollected a bottle of opium that I had in my trunk, and I managed to get it and persuade the sick man to take a large dose, which he did under the impression that I was a servant, and was handing him a glass of wine.

The opiate acted in a beneficial manner, for his system was so weakened that it set him into a deep sleep, which lasted for a number of hours; and before he had awakened we had removed him to a little room that we had partitioned off from the main store, where he could be free from most of the noise and confusion that large sales occasioned.

About sunrise, the first person that entered the store was the old man's nephew, Follet. He looked agitated and alarmed, and shuddered when he saw the stains of blood upon the doorstep, and also on the floor of the store where we had rested the old man before putting him on the mattress. He did not raise his eyes to our faces, although many times I endeavored to get a fair glance at his face, to see if I could read his thoughts.

"I have bad news this morning," he said, at length, finding we were not disposed to open the conversation.

"Have you, indeed?" asked Fred, with a slight sneer.

"I slept from my uncle's tent last night," he went on to say, "and upon returning this morning I find that there has been violence and robbery committed. My poor relative is missing, and I fear murdered, for his bed is bloody, and tracks of blood are to be seen on the ground."

"And in regard to the robbery," Fred asked, "how do you know that he has lost any thing?"

"O, I am positive on that score, because my uncle had about a thousand ounces of gold, in nuggets and fine dust, buried under one corner of his tent, and the treasure is gone," cried Follet, eagerly.

"You are certain of that, I suppose?" Fred asked.

"O, quite certain, because the gold is the first thing that I thought of when I found that my uncle had been murdered," exclaimed the young fellow, with his eyes still cast to the floor.

"Do you suspect any one?" we asked, with a design to bring him out.

"There is blood upon your door step and floor, and the tracks lead this way," he answered evasively.

I saw that he raised his eyes quick as lightning to note what effect his words had upon us; but meeting the stern glance of Fred, he again gazed upon the floor.

"I suppose that we might effect a compromise, and get somebody to swear that we did not molest your uncle, if we promised five hundred of the thousand ounces that the robbers and would-be assassins obtained," Fred remarked, in an under tone, and in a careless sort of manner.

"I, for one," the young fellow replied, "should never be disposed to

ask questions, although you can imagine my feelings at the thought of the bad treatment that the old fellow received. When can I have the dust?"

The question disconcerted Fred for a moment, for he had no idea that the fellow would answer as he did.

"As soon as your uncle is well enough to talk about money matters, we will mention the subject," I rejoined, hastily.

"Well enough?" he asked; "I thought that you said he was dead."

"O, bless you, no, indeed; he is far from being a dead man, and we hope, by proper treatment, to see him well in the course of a few weeks."

The nephew's face darkened, and his eyes looked snaky, as though he would like to strike, but dared not. We motioned to him, and led the way to the small private room where Mr. Critchet was lying, and when he saw his uncle's wan features, he turned pale, and his agitation was intense.

He saw that we were watching his movements, and tried to appear as though surprised, but the artificial effort was too much for him; and finally he turned and left the room, giving as an excuse that his feelings overpowered him.

"You can see the sufferer every day, if you are disposed," Fred said, "but it must always be in the presence of witnesses. When your uncle is well he can act as he pleases, but here he remains until cured."

"Your language is mysterious, and seems to reflect upon me as a man of honor," he exclaimed. "Do I understand you to say that you suspect me of injuring my poor uncle, whom I loved above all earthly things?"

"With the exception of playing cards," Fred added.

"You shall be sorry for your words, and perhaps I may make you appear in rather an equivocal light before many hours have passed;" and with a look of devilish malice the nephew, who had attempted to murder his old uncle for a few thousand dollars' worth of gold dust, left the store, and we did not care if we never laid eyes upon his treacherous, cold-looking face again, although I had serious forebodings that we had not got rid of him entirely, and that he would work us injury.

I hinted something of the kind to Fred, but he laughed at it, and in a few minutes we had a rush of morning customers, and all thoughts of Follet and his vengeance were banished from my mind.

I think that we were seated at breakfast, and wondering why Mr. Brown had been absent for such a length of time from the store, when who should pay us a visit but the police commissioner, Mr. Sherwin, a tall, dignified man, with a face that had no more expression in it than a piece of coal. He was never known to lean to the side of mercy during the whole of his career as an officer, and as commissioner he had exclusive jurisdiction over the petty court of Ballarat, and fined and sentenced miners, who were brought before him for drunkenness and petty larceny, without mercy. He was an ambitious man, and had striven for a long time to get a seat upon one of the benches of the upper courts in Melbourne, but owing to the want of influence, he had never succeeded. Every person that he imagined could sway the governor-general was treated with delightful consideration; but a look

blacker than a raven's wing was the reward of every one who ventured on familiarity not up to his standard of excellence.

I must confess that I was surprised at the early visit of the commissioner, and I was still more astonished when I saw half a dozen policemen near the door, as though they were on business that they were ashamed of, and desired to keep out of sight; still, it never entered our minds that we were the parties that the policemen were watching.

Supposing that the commissioner wished to purchase some articles from our store, Fred went to attend upon him, while I continued to eat my breakfast.

"I want no goods, sir," returned Mr. Sherwin, in a short, sharp tone, in reply to Fred's question as to what he would be served with.

Fred appeared slightly disconcerted, and returned to his breakfast with an independent expression upon his face, that spoke more than words the contempt he felt for the visitor.

"You young men appear to be quite at your ease," the commissioner said, surveying our indifference with no favorable eye.

"Why should we not be?" asked Fred; "we have a license for our store, we have paid for our goods, and owe no man a penny."

"Does your license extend to killing and robbing men?" asked the commissioner, in an insolent tone, and one that we knew he used to insult us with.

Fred sprang to his feet, and an angry reply was upon his tongue, but I managed to check him.

"An explanation of these words is required," I said, as mildly as my nature would allow; and to my surprise, instead of facing me, and answering, the commissioner pointed to the stains on the floor, and asked, in a sneering tone, —

"Whose blood is that?"

"That of an old and helpless man," I returned, bearing his searching glance without flinching, although I had an inward feeling that told me that we were standing in a suspicious attitude, and that one false move would wreck us both.

"Remember," Mr. Sherwin continued, "I do not ask you to criminate yourselves, but if a full confession is made, I will lay the matter before the governor-general, and perhaps he may be disposed to grant you some mercy. I fancy that a frank confession would be the most desirable course for both of you to pursue," the commissioner said, in a careless tone, as though he did not care whether we complied with his advice or not.

"All the confession that we can make is to tell the truth," cried Fred, who always grew cooler the more imminent the danger; "we will simply state the facts, and then you can judge of our guilt."

The commissioner made a sign for Fred to go on, although I could see by his face that he was anticipating a yarn, and was prepared to believe just as much of it as he pleased.

Fred told the circumstances of the affair just as they occurred, and without equivocation. Mr. Sherwin listened without interruption, and also, I will add, without belief.

"Of course I can see the old man?" the commissioner asked, in a half-sneering manner, as though prepared for us to deny him the right.

"Certainly," answered Fred; and he led the way to the little private room where Mr. Critchet was lying, and, to our joy, still sleeping, which argued well for his ultimate recovery.

"Here is the man whom you accuse us of murdering," Fred whispered; "see what pains we have taken to hasten his end." And he pointed to the numerous bandages with which we had bound up his wounds.

"I was prepared to find the body of Mr. Critchet here, but not alive," the commissioner said. "I was told that he was dead, and that I could find unmistakable signs of those who committed the murder, here."

"Perhaps you will give us the name of your informant. We desire to be confronted with the man who dares charge us with assassination!"

Fred spoke with firmness, and with a degree of hauteur that was not habitual.

Mr. Sherwin hesitated for a moment, and then stepped out of the little room and beckoned to a police officer.

The latter did not display that degree of alacrity that one would have suspected in obeying the summons, and upon looking at the man, I found that he had accompanied us on our tax-gathering tours, and that he was aware of the estimation in which Mr. Brown held us, and was fearful that he should incur the inspector's displeasure if he manifested too great an eagerness in our affairs.

"Michael," said the commissioner, "bring in Follet."

We started at the words, and then we saw a dark smile upon the face of the cold-hearted commissioner, that told how keenly he enjoyed our misery.

"If you please, sir," said Michael, cap in hand, and a beseeching glance upon his face, "I think that Follet is lying, for I've known him for six months past, and never saw or heard much about his habits that is favorable."

"I did not ask your opinion or advice, sir," interrupted the commissioner, in the same cold tone, and with a look that almost froze the policeman; "do as I bid you, and learn to keep silent."

Michael looked as though he would like to make a reply, but fear of losing his place prevented. He walked slowly to the door, and after a delay of a few minutes, escorted our accuser, Follet, into the store.

The fellow's face was deadly pale, and his eyes were never once raised during the interview. He had evidently schooled himself for the part that he was to play, by imbibing deeply of some spirituous liquor, for he was rather unsteady in his gait; but that might have been the result of agitation as well as whiskey.

"Are these the two men whom you alluded to in my office this morning?" the commissioner inquired, pointing to Fred and myself.

The scoundrel, without raising his eyes, replied in the affirmative.

"Repeat in their presence what you told me, and mind that you don't tell two stories."

The fellow cleared his throat, which was rather husky, and in a monotonous tone began. The policemen, who were lounging near the

door, had all edged their way into the store, and listened to the recital with many expressions of wonder and disbelief upon their faces.

"About three weeks ago," Follet began, "these two men [pointing to Fred and myself] asked me if my uncle was not digging out a large amount of dust and nuggets from his claim. I said yes; that he would probably get five or six thousand pounds, if it held out as well as it opened. We exchanged a few other words, and then the question was indirectly put to me — if my poor uncle was in the habit of sending his money to the government office or keeping it buried in his tent. I suspected nothing, for I knew that the men stood in good estimation with the police force, and foolishly answered that he seldom sent money by escort to Melbourne, as he feared to trust the soldiers with it. I thought no more of the matter until about a week ago these same men sent for me, and by indirect inquiries wanted to know if I would share with them in robbing my poor uncle's tent. I indignantly repulsed them, and threatened to give information to the police if another word was uttered concerning the subject, and I had supposed that the matter was dropped, until, on my return home this morning at an early hour, I found that foul play had been practised, and that my relative had been robbed, and I didn't know but that he was murdered, for I saw blood on various articles in the tent; and when I reached this building, where I first went to see if its occupants had been concerned in the outrage, I found blood upon the doorstep and also upon the floor, and these men were badly agitated, and even offered me five hundred ounces if I would keep silent, and not inform of them. I indignantly refused, and then these men showed me the body of my uncle so terribly mangled, that I was sick at heart; and thinking that I should share his fate if I remained, I hurried away, and laid the whole matter before you for investigation. What I have uttered is the truth, so help me God!"

The miserable, lying wretch ceased speaking, but trembled so that a policeman was obliged to support him.

For a few seconds Fred and myself looked at each other in consternation and despair. If the testimony of the wretch was taken without a grain of allowance, we were in a dilemma that would tax us to the utmost to find means of escape. Even the policemen appeared to have changed their opinions, and ranged themselves against us, and we could hear them whisper in relation to the straightforward manner in which Follet recited his story.

A smile of triumph was upon the face of Mr. Sherwin, and already I thought he was congratulating himself upon judicial promotion for his shrewdness in causing our detection, when the arrival of a new comer put a little different light upon the affair.

CHAPTER LIII.

Opportune Arrival of Mr. Brown. — They send for Steel Spring.

Of all persons in the world the one most welcome to our eyes was Mr. Brown, the inspector; and when he made his appearance at the door, looking dusty, hot, and tired, we were tempted to rush forward and embrace him, for he seemed as though capable of delivering us from the perplexing situation in which we stood, although in what manner we were unable to say, for the commissioner was his superior officer, and could dispose of us as he pleased, regardless of the remonstrances of his associate.

"My dear boys," the inspector said, coming hastily towards us, and extending his hand, regardless of the presence of the commissioner, who scowled at the interruption, yet did not think it worth while to protest against it, — "my dear boys," he continued, "I have but this moment arrived in Ballarat from a short visit to Melbourne, where I was unexpectedly called on business, and learned at the office that some trifling charge had been trumped up against you, and without waiting to change my dress, or wash the stains of travel from my face and hands, I hurried here to see in what way I could assist you."

"And we gladly welcome you, for we find that a grave charge is preferred against us, and all our assertions of innocence will not avail us," returned Fred, in a sorrowful tone.

"Pooh! don't be low spirited — I'll investigate the facts of the case, and I'll warrant that every thing will be all right. I will relieve you of a troublesome duty, sir, and take charge of this matter," the inspector said, turning to the commissioner; but to Mr. Brown's surprise the latter bowed rather coldly, and declined the offer.

"I have begun to investigate this matter, and will complete it, sir," he said.

"I believe that I have always attended to the duties of my office in a satisfactory manner, and this is the first time during my connection with the police force that I have been supplanted by a superior," cried Mr. Brown, rather angrily.

"I shall act my pleasure in this case, or in any other that I choose to interfere with. Here are two men charged with a heavy robbery and an attempt at assassination, and my duty will not permit me to let the parties escape until a full investigation is made;" and the commissioner straightened himself up as though he was as immovable as granite.

"An attempt at assassination?" echoed the inspector, turning towards us for an explanation.

"That is the charge," I replied.

"And who dares make such an assertion?" Mr. Brown asked, his face pale with suppressed excitement.

"Mr. Follet has presented the complaint to me, and backed it with some proof that looks conclusive," the commissioner said, pointing to

the perjured villain, who stood with sullen aspect a short distance from us.

"Do you dare bring such a charge against these men?" asked the inspector, facing the lying scamp, and endeavoring to get a glimpse at his face. "Take time for your answer, and consider the suspicious manner in which you stand in the estimation of the police at Ballarat. I know you and your doings."

Follet made an appealing gesture to the commissioner, and the latter interfered.

"I will have no browbeating of the witness," he said. "He appeared before me in good faith, and until his assertions are contradicted, I shall consider that he is under my protection."

"But if I can show you that he is unworthy of belief, and that for months past he has been in the habit of gambling with money which he has purloined from his uncle, and that he owes large debts which he has contracted, and is unable to pay, will that have any effect upon you in judging of this matter?" demanded Mr. Brown, with some warmth.

"If you can prove to me that these young men are innocent of the charge, then I shall be ready to listen to complaints against Follet, but not until then. Bad habits sometimes prejudice the minds of a jury against a witness, and testimony is weighed in connection with circumstantial matters which are brought to light. I think that we have a strong case, for there are marks of blood, and the victim is found under this roof almost lifeless, but with bandages on the wounds. Now it is a question in my mind, whether this binding up of the injuries is not a trick for the purpose of escaping punishment. If——"

"But these men are above suspicion," cried the inspector, impatiently.

"I have not finished yet," the commissioner said, coldly. "I was about to observe that if more evidence was wanting this would complete it;" and bending down, he inserted his arm in a barrel that was partially filled with rice, and to our utter consternation, held up to our view a sheath knife covered with blood.

"Perhaps your friends can account for the presence of this knife in their store?" asked the commissioner, with a cold smile at the distress that he saw upon our faces.

"We cannot," I answered. "We had two dozen of just such knives when we commenced business, and sold the last one that we had yesterday."

"I will wager a hundred ounces that Follet put the knife in the barrel when he visited the store this morning," cried the inspector, dogmatically.

"Did you sell a knife of this pattern to Mr. Follet?" asked Sherwin, turning to us.

Mr. Brown seemed to take fresh courage at the question, and we could see that he was anxious for us to answer in the affirmative. Had we done so, the commissioner would have been staggered with the coincidence, and our dismissal have followed instantly.

But we disdained to lie even to save ourselves from incarceration, and much to the disgust of Mr. Brown, and the triumph of the commissioner, we replied without a moment's hesitancy,—

"Mr. Follet never purchased a knife at our store."

"Do you wish for more conclusive proof?" asked Mr. Sherwin.

"Proof?" echoed the inspector; "I hope that you don't call the finding of the knife in that barrel proof. I do not believe that these young men, the preservers of my life, would commit an outrage of the kind that you charge them with for all the gold in Ballarat."

"Time will, perhaps, reveal the secret of the affair. Mr. Critchet may live, and be able to give us a clew to his assailants; and until he recovers or dies, I think that I shall be justified in committing your friends to prison without bail."

The words of the commissioner fell upon our ears like a thunderbolt. A dozen different ideas coursed through my brain, yet I was too much bowed down with grief to attempt to form them into tangible shapes. And even while I was thinking what would become of the store and contents during our imprisonment, Mr. Brown broke the ominous silence.

"This is a case where bail can be readily given, if you will accept of it, and any amount that you may name will be forthcoming," the inspector said, addressing the commissioner.

"I have concluded not to accept of bail, and I shall not alter my determination, sir. I leave the prisoners in your hands, and you will render a good account of them to me when I call for them."

The commissioner bowed coldly, and was about to return to his office when Mr. Brown interrupted him.

"I am not a rich man, as you know," he said, "but I have a little property, and it can readily be converted into cash. I will place five thousand pounds in your hands for the appearance of these gentlemen, if you will admit them to bail."

"And we will deposit half of that sum in addition to insure our appearance," cried Fred, eagerly.

The commissioner shook his head, and already his foot was on the doorstep, when Mr. Brown detained him.

"I shall be absent from Ballarat for four days," he said, testily.

"Where do you propose going?" inquired Mr. Sherwin, with a slight indication of curiosity.

"To Melbourne, as fast as horse can carry me. I start immediately."

"May I ask for what object?"

"To lay this matter before his excellency the governor-general, and obtain an order for the admission of the prisoners to bail, and the detention of Follet for conspiracy. Michael, run to my office and bring my best horse."

The policeman started on a run, and was lost to sight in a cloud of dust that swept along the street. The commissioner looked slightly perplexed and undecided. He was evidently taken by surprise at the position which Mr. Brown had assumed.

"You cannot hope that the governor will rule contrary to my decision?" Mr. Sherwin said.

"I know that he will. His excellency has too great an esteem for these gentlemen to allow them to languish in prison when no stronger proof than the story which a broken-down gambler can invent is urged as evidence against them."

"Do you mean to say that the governor is acquainted with these (men, he was intending to say, but altered it) *gentlemen?*"

"So well that he has granted every request that they have made; and he has even offered them commissions in the service in return for many acts of bravery which they have performed."

Mr. Brown was right in the first instance; for the only requests that we had ever made were for the pardons of Smith and the old convict.

"Are you sure that you are not mistaken?" inquired the commissioner, with a sudden degree of interest that was quite refreshing, when contrasted with his former indifference.

"I am so sure," Mr. Brown said, in answer to the commissioner's question, "that three days since I saw the governor, and he inquired for these gentlemen, and sent a message that they must call and see him the first time that they visited Melbourne."

"Have you any letters or documents to prove that his excellency regards these gentlemen with unusual interest?"

The inspector glanced towards us, in hope that we could rescue him from the position in which his assertions had placed him, but we were afraid that we could benefit him but little, as we were not in possession of an autograph letter from the governor, and what was more, had never seen one. I suddenly recollected, however, having in my possession a copy of one of the Melbourne papers, in which our services at the great fire were mentioned in eulogistic terms; and I concluded that I would let Mr. Sherwin peruse the paragraph, in hopes that he would imagine much more than the reality.

My experiment succeeded admirably.

Mr. Sherwin eagerly perused the paragraph; and after he had concluded, folded the paper, and requested permission to speak with Mr. Brown in private for a few minutes. Obedient to the intimation, the policemen and the rest of us fell back, and suffered the two officers to have a quiet talk. They whispered together earnestly for a time, and then Fred and myself were summoned to the council.

"The commissioner is not disposed to press this matter," Mr. Brown said. "I have convinced him that you are a little different from what he supposed; and he will admit both of you to bail until such time as Mr. Critchet is able to testify, or at least until more evidence is offered than what Follet brings forward."

We bowed our thanks, and blessed the governor-general, to think that his name made such a difference with his officers.

"We cannot be too careful in this part of the country," the commissioner said, "whom we trust, we are so liable to imposition. Our life is a hard one, to make the best of it; and I shall be glad when I am changed to some other location, where jurisdiction is not taken so extensively as at Ballarat. I have long desired a change."

Mr. Brown winked with both eyes in a violent manner, as though warning us that the pitch of his regret at being at Ballarat was yet to come.

"One good turn deserves another," Mr. Sherwin said; and then lowering his voice, he continued, "May I hope that you will remind his excellency that I deserve a better position than the one that I now hold?"

Promises are easily made, (*vide* politicians in this country, where offices are to be obtained;) and the reader will not wonder, considering the light in which we stood, that we murmured a ready assent to his wishes. The commissioner looked gratified, while Mr. Brown grinned with delight.

"What shall we do with the wounded man, and this young fellow, Follet? He has made a strong charge against these gentlemen, and he should be made to give heavy bonds to meet it at the proper time," said the inspector, pointing to the nephew, who stood trembling, as though already anticipating trouble.

"Well, really," Mr. Sherwin said, "I don't see why the old man should not remain under the charge of your friends until his injuries terminate one way or the other. Suppose you send the government physician to attend him, and a fortnight from to-day I will call the case up, and decide whether to dismiss it or send it to trial."

"And Follet? Hadn't he better be put under heavy bonds for his appearance?" insinuated the inspector.

"Certainly; it is very important to keep him. Let him be committed to jail until he can find bonds in one thousand pounds;" and with a cheerful wave of his hand, the commissioner left us.

"You see how much you have injured yourself in trying to fasten your crime upon these gentlemen," Mr. Brown remarked, addressing Follet; "if you will make a free confession, I will endeavor to get you as comfortable a sentence as possible."

"Will you?" sneered the wretch; "you shall offer better terms than that before I will let them up. I have the game in my own hands, and my evidence will tell before a jury."

"Take him away," cried Mr. Brown, addressing a policeman; and after the prisoner was out of hearing, he continued, "There is too much truth in what he says, and we have work before us to discover who his accomplice is, and bring him to justice. Even if Mr. Critchet does recover, it is probable that he will not be able to identify his assailants, and in that view of the matter I need not tell you in what a precarious situation you will stand."

We saw the force of his reasoning, and looked to him for advice.

"We must set the police at work to find Follet's accomplice; and I will not leave a stone unturned on 'Gravel Pit Hill,' but I will discover him if in Ballarat."

"And is there any way that we can assist you?" I asked.

The inspector thought for a few moments before he replied.

"If we could but get Murden to lend us Steel Spring for a week or two," he muttered, "I think that we could make that scamp serviceable to us."

"Murden will accommodate us in that respect, I am sure, if we make application," I returned.

"If he will, we can set the fellow at work, and he will be able to get information that no policeman in Ballarat could possibly obtain. He must be supplied with a liberal amount of money, and must represent himself as being connected with a gang of bushrangers between here and Melbourne. I will give the 'Traps' a hint not to molest him unless he betakes himself to roguery again, and I suppose that he will some day."

"But won't suspicion be aroused if Steel Spring is seen to enter the store, or hold communication with us?" we asked.

"Of course it would," returned the inspector, with a smile, at our innocence; "of all the persons in Ballarat, you must be the most avoided, and when an interview is needed, a rendezvous must be appointed where there is no fear of listeners. Take my word for it, in less than a fortnight we shall have the true account of the attempted assassination, and if Follet's companion does not leave the town, we will nab him, and 'pinch' him severely. Write to the lieutenant at once, and don't fail to tell him that your reputation, and perhaps life, depends upon the loan of Steel Spring."

With these parting words, the inspector left for his office, and without delaying for a moment, I sat down, and briefly wrote an account of the transaction in which we were involved, and stated the necessity there was for the employment of a spy of Steel Spring's adroitness. I succeeded in getting my note posted before the mail left Melbourne, and soon after my return to the store, the surgeon of the police force made his appearance, and examined the wounds of our patient with some considerable skill, and did us the honor of saying that he could do no more than we had already done; and John Bull like, wondered where we got our knowledge of the art of healing. He thought that there was danger of inflammation; and ordered a cooling draught and low diet, and then said that he considered we were competent to attend the patient, unless he was worse, in which case we were to send for him, and not without.

And we did attend the old gentleman; hour after hour, and night after night, we watched by his side, barely taking rest ourselves, for fear that he would suffer; and although he was unconscious of our kindness and attention, and was wandering in his mind, many miles away to his family and friends in busy London, yet we never lost our patience, or refused to gratify his wants, as far as lay in our power.

Day after day passed, and we were impatient to hear from Murden. Mr. Brown had put his police to work to find out the accomplice of Follet, but all attempts to discover him had proved futile.

Follet still remained obstinate and defying; and to add to our misery, our patient was hovering between life and death, and it seemed as though a feather would turn the scale either way.

One night, soon after twelve o'clock, and while I was taking my turn watching by the bedside of Mr. Critchet, I heard a gentle tap at the door. I paid no attention to the first summons; and not until a repetition warned me that some person was desirous of entering, did I cock my revolver, and without disturbing Fred, stole softly to the door, which I unlocked, and discovered a man with a long black beard and slouched hat, standing on the doorsteps, whistling, in a low key, the popular negro tune, just introduced into Australia from California, by a band of negro singers, of "Nelly Bly."

"What is wanted?" I asked, bringing my revolver up so as to command his head, in case his visit was hostile.

"Can you tell me the time of night?" he demanded, in a tone so gruff and guttural, that I thought he must have slept in a mine for a week, and that the dampness had gone to his lungs.

"Ask the first mounted policeman that you come to," I rejoined, and

was about to slam the door to, when I heard a peculiar chuckle that arrested my attention.

"Vell, if this 'ere isn't a go!" the man with the black beard said; "a feller comes hall the vay from Melbourne to see a friend, and gets the door shut in his face."

I knew the voice, and should know it if I met its owner fifty years hence. I seized the visitor by his collar, dragged him into the store, shut the door, tore off his black beard, and had revealed to my eyes the grinning countenance of *Steel Spring!*

CHAPTER LIV.

The Way the Colonists obtain Wives in Australia.

"Vell, of all the jolly things in the world, if this don't knock 'um," Steel Spring said, with one of his most hideous grins. "I told my friend, Murden, and I halso 'inted the same thing to 'is excellency the governor, the last time that I dined vid him, and just as he was axing me to take vine, that I would vager a stiff glass of viskey, vich you vill ax me to take by and by, that you vouldn't know me on the first occasion of my visit. 'Steel Spring,' said the governor, 'it can't be did;' and ven I pledged my vord as a gentleman and a man of probity, that I vould vrite to him the result, in a strict sense, he shook my 'and, and said I was a honor to the land wot give me birth, and that he 'oped he should never be called upon to part vid me. Ven can I 'ave the viskey?"

I stood a few minutes surveying the ex-bushranger with admiration, and hardly knowing whether he most deserved a kicking or a word of praise for his falsehoods and perfect disguise. While I was considering the matter, Fred joined us, being awakened by the shrill chuckling of our visitor.

"You have not forgotten how to lie, at all events," I said, "and perhaps the peculiar talent that you display in that line may be of some service to us; so, for the purpose of keeping in practice, all your stories will go undisputed at present."

"Ven a man is perfect in a certain line of things, he don' vant practice, unless he grows rusty, or is out of employment. Now, since I have been connected vid the police force, I've almost forgotten how to speak the truth; and, somehow, I don't think that it agrees vid me; for unless I'se honest I have a fit of blues that lasts me until I've made up to my reckness. Ven can I have the viskey?"

I gave him a glass of strong American whiskey, which would make the tears come into a man's eyes unless his throat was sheathed with tin; but Steel Spring tossed it down, and smacked his lips, as though it was so much water.

"Now, then, I feel like a man vot has found a nugget — perfectly

happy for the time being, but miserable as soon as the excitement has passed away, 'cos he don't know when he shall get another."

"When did you reach Ballarat?" Fred asked, as soon as Steel Spring was inclined to hold his tongue.

"This evening. I've been on the road two days, but feel as fresh as a newly-hatched parrot."

"Did Murden tell you what we required of you?" I asked.

"He said something about my getting the vorst thrashing that I ever had in my life, unless I obeyed orders. So here I am, ready to go to vork and do my best."

"Where are you stopping?" I inquired.

"Vell, the lieutenant said that I vos to play *loose;* and pretend not to go near you, unless I vos so fixed up that even my dear friend, the governor, vouldn't know me; and I don't think that he vould, had he seen me to-night."

"But where are you stopping?" I again asked.

"Vell, I am at Dan Brian's 'Cricket,' and I must say that my old friend keeps tiptop lush, and is disposed to be civil," answered Steel Spring.

The "Cricket" was one of the vilest places in Ballarat; and its proprietor, Dan Brian, one of the most noted characters. He was once a convict, but made his escape, and joined a gang of bushrangers. For two years he lived in the bush, and subsisted by killing sheep and cattle.

Soon after the gold mines were discovered, he helped to rob a government escort of dust on its way to Melbourne, and two thousand ounces of gold fell to his share. His ill-gotten wealth made him long for an opportunity to squander it; and unknown to the gang, he sent word to the captain of police at Melbourne, and asked what terms he could receive if he betrayed his comrades.

Of course the police were too ready to accede to any proposition that Dan might make to haggle about terms; and the Judas was promised not only his life and a free pardon, but it was intimated that the treasure in his possession should never be claimed by government.

On these considerations Dan promised to turn traitor; and one day he persuaded the gang to visit a spot which they considered unsafe, but which Dan swore no policeman would ever dare to venture in. The bushrangers were surrounded, surprised, and captured, and executed to a man, with the exception of the betrayer.

After this bloody piece of work, the fellow spent most of his money in dissipation, and when it was nearly all gone, he determined to open a resort for thieves and assassins at Ballarat; and although the police knew the kind of house he maintained, yet they were unable to break him up for want of evidence to convict him and his guests.

Some went even so far as to say that he furnished information to the police for certain considerations, but Mr. Brown always denied the imputation with great eagerness.

"Does Dan know what brings you to Ballarat?" I asked, resuming the conversation with our visitor.

"He's already bin pumping, but the clapper don't work. I told him I was after a few *scrags*, for the purpose of raising a gang, and taking the bush agin; and he thinks it's so, and promised to help me. I 'opes

I don't forfeit your confidence by being compelled to tell a lie. It goes agin me, you know."

We readily promised him that all such little failings on his part should be overlooked; and after a second edition of whiskey, we laid our trouble and plans before him, and gave him full directions how to proceed.

He was to frequent all places where crime was committed or planned; to converse with all sorts of characters, honest or otherwise; to avoid the police, and pretend an intense hatred for them; and when he wished to communicate with us, it must only be done in the night time, and dressed in such a disguise that none of his gang would recognize him.

In case of his discovering Follet's companion in the attempted assassination, he was to let us know, so that the fellow's arrest could take place immediately; and while we agreed to find money for his expenses, we promised a handsome gratuity in case he was successful.

Steel Spring listened with more patience than I ever gave him credit for, while we were enlightening his mind; and although he asked a dozen different questions, which we considered at the time as frivolous, we answered them to the best of our ability, and gave him what insight we were able to regarding the company that Follet had been in the habit of keeping.

"There, that will do for the present," Steel Spring said. "Ef the feller is in Ballarat, I shall hear of 'im afore long. Give me another drink of viskey, and I'll be off, 'cos a select company of the *elite* of Ballarat expects me to honor their supper vid my presence in about an hour's time, and ven I gives my vord to a gentleman I don't like to disappint um. Keep cool, and don't be afeerd of swinging on this little affair, 'cos there's no danger. Ef I thought there was, I should certainly speak to my friend, the governor."

"Mr. Murden did not send you here to jest, did he?" asked Fred, a little sternly.

"O, by no means; and I didn't mean any 'arm by vot I said. Please don't say any thing to the lieutenant."

We promised; and Steel Spring turned to go, quite satisfied. Just as he reached the door, he stopped, and drew a very dirty-looking letter from his bosom, and handed it to us.

"I'd almost forgotten that Lieutenant Murden sent this letter by me. Good night. I'll see you again to-morrow some time, but it will be late in the evening;" and with these words he stole from the store as noiselessly as a serpent creeping towards a paroquet sleeping on a gum tree.

We broke the flaming red seal of our friend's letter, and read as follows:—

MELBOURNE, Jan. 24th, 18—.

MY DEAR FRIENDS: You may believe that I was astonished when I got your letter. Such damnable scrapes as you two are always getting into, warrants me in saying that a keeper is needed in your store to take the entire charge of you. I wish that I could get away for a few days; I'd run up and lend you a helping hand to clear up that shocking affair.

As I can't leave, I send Steel Spring, agreeable to request. May you

make the most of him, for such a liar never went unhanged. As an incentive to stir himself in your behalf, I thrashed him like the devil on the afternoon that he left, and promised a repetition unless he obeyed orders, and followed your directions to the letter.

I find that the oftener I lick him the better he likes me; and he actually pretended to feel grieved at parting. I have great hope that he will live long enough to be honest; but I have reasonable doubts of the scheme, and it would not surprise me any day to hear that he had taken to the bush. Still, I must say that I find him useful in a number of ways; and a better detective cannot be found in the country, for no matter what I have placed him on, he has followed it up until the mystery was unravelled.

Yesterday, a ship load of interesting girls, many of them in interesting conditions, arrived from England, being sent out by a society for the prevention of pauperism, or something like it. They are intended as wives for us poor colonists; and I wish that you had been here, to have seen the fun and the rush for the first choice. The ship was surrounded by boats, until at length the crowd was so great I had to take twenty-five men, and hire a steamboat to carry us down the river, to where the vessel was lying. The uproar and confusion was great—terrific.

Men wanted their first pick, and swore frightfully when they couldn't be gratified. The women all wanted stout, healthy husbands, and rich ones at that, and they shrieked some when told that they must take them by lot.

However, sooner than go unmarried, the girls at length consented to any arrangement that was proposed; and then what a time we had of it! for you are well aware that delicacy is not a characteristic of Australia. Amidst the crowd, struggling for a wife right manfully, did I observe the teamster whom Smith has in his employ, and who made you one visit with his load of goods while I was at Ballarat. He did honor to the firm, for the fellow got one of the best looking (and I will say at the same time, one of the most vicious, if I am any judge of faces) on board, out of a cargo of one hundred and ninety-eight.

I asked your man what he intended to do with a wife in his circumstances.

"Marry her," he replied, "and take her to Ballarat, and go into the mining business."

So look out for an addition to the population in a short time.

A day was required to get all the girls married off; for those who were left till the last stage were not of an enticing character; and there was a slight prospect of a row between the snub-nosed women, each of whom thought she was superior in point of beauty to the others; and not until I sent on shore and got three Victoria miners, not over scrupulous in taste, were they disposed to be silent.

You should have been in Melbourne on the first night of the arrival. Of course, where so many marriages took place, some little latitude was allowed to the happy couples; and more carousing I have not seen since whiskey was only a pound per gallon. The beauty of the arrangement was that the men got drunk, and one half of them could not tell the next morning whom they had married, or whether they had married at all.

The wives were in the same state of blissful ignorance, for they had not known their husbands long enough to get familiar with their features; and you will admit that where all men wear their beards in full, there is some resemblance between us bipeds.

Our police office was besieged from morning until night, by anxious husbands and inconsolable wives. Six different times was your friend seized upon and claimed as the lawful spouse of six different women, two of whom were the snub-noses spoken of above.

I hope you will admire the taste of your employee in the selection of a wife, and that you will continue to conduct yourself in a decorous manner after her arrival. Fair play, and don't take advantage — (the balance of the line was illegible.)

I must close my letter by once more recommending you to keep a bright lookout for Steel Spring, and to write me information if he does not come up to your expectations. Let me hear from you as soon as practicable, and don't forget to send me all the news that is stirring, including mining tax and other matters. By the way, the artillery corps in this place have received orders to be in readiness for instant duty and marching order. They are practising with their guns every day. Their destination is a secret, although I think I can *guess* where they are to go.

Yours in purity and honesty, MURDEN.

The next day we informed the inspector of Steel Spring's arrival, and the place where he was domiciled; and the former hinted to his sergeant that the latter should be watched narrowly, but was not to be interfered with unless something criminal was noted, in which case he was to be arrested without delay. Of course Mr. Brown did not impart to his subordinates what the ex-bushranger was attempting to accomplish, and the matter always remained a secret to them.

We saw nothing of Steel Spring until two days after his arrival, when he paid us a nocturnal visit, disguised as usual, and gave us some information that was of real importance.

"I'se getting along werry slowly," he said, "'cos I've got to creep afore I can walk. But things is vorking, and no mistake; and I 'spected ven I took that horn of viskey the other night, that it would clear my hideas, and make me find somethin'."

"Well, what have you found out?" I demanded.

"That the confounded dust gets into my throat, and keeps me dry, and I think will really drive me into a galloping consumption some time. I'se dry now, and I think that if you had some vater here vid the brackishness taken off vid a little somethin' good, that it would help me."

We understood the hint, and gratified it; only after we had poured out a tumbler of whiskey, he refused to have it spoiled by adding a drop of water, as he thought that the latter was most too salt to agree with his constitution. He drained the glass, smacked his lips, and made up such a hideous face that he would have frightened a person of delicate nerves into fits, had his countenance been seen.

"Now, then, for the information!" I cried.

"Vell, then, to business. I vant some more money."

"You shan't have it until you give a good account of yourself, and tell us what you have done with the gold we already gave you."

"O, werry well," the mutinous scamp replied, moving towards the door; "ven you get ready to give me the chink, I'll be ready to vork for you, and not until then."

He had already got his hand upon the latch, and was making a motion to open the door, when Fred sprang upon him by his collar, and despite of his long, spider-like legs, hurled him to the floor, where he lay for a moment motionless and senseless. He raised his head, however, after a while, and attempted to get to his feet, but Fred was watching his motions, and grasping him by his neck, choked him, until the impudent fellow was almost black in his face, and was glad to beg for mercy.

"Will you answer our questions now?" Fred asked, giving him a shake.

"I'll do any thing hereafter," he gasped, "that you desire; only don't squeeze the breath entirely out of my body."

"Now, then, tell us what information you have received, and let us have no more of your impudence; and if you don't tell a straight story we'll beat you to death with our horsewhips."

Steel Spring understood the meaning of the language used, and he saw that he had men to deal with who were not disposed to submit to his demands and impudence, as he supposed they would. His confident air was gone, and an abject one assumed its place.

"Last night," he commenced, "I vas sitting vid a few coves in Dan's crib, talking flash, ven von of 'em mentioned the case which I is hunting up. I pretended that I didn't know vot vas meant, and axed in a careless sort of vay for the particulars. One of the coves tells me how old Critchet got lammed, and then said that the coves didn't get any thing, 'cos the old feller had carried all of his money to the government office, and took a paper for the amount. I axed him how he knowed, and he said he seed the old cock lugging the dust to the office, and followed him, thinking that if he could get a chance he would crack him over his head, and make a raise. I didn't make many 'quiries, 'cos I thought I vould vate a little vile until I got 'quainted."

"And was there any thing said about the parties who committed the outrage?" I asked.

"There vas a few hints, but not enough to give me a hold. However, von of the chaps said that he would show me a man vot helped in the business to-morrow night, if I vished."

"And what answer did you make?" we inquired eagerly.

"I said that I thought he would make a good pal for the bush, and that I would like to know him, and talk the matter over with a few good ones vot I had already spoken to."

"And what do you propose to do in case the assassin meets you?" we demanded.

"Get him to talk of the matter — praise him for his courage, make him boast of it, and then nab him, and vere is he? Ve have the feller fast and no mistake, and vether the old gent lives or dies ve don't care, 'cos ve shows the commissioner that you're hinnocent."

"How many men will be required to act as you state?" we asked.

"As few as possible," responded Steel Spring, promptly; "three besides myself. Say Mr. Brown and both of you."

We knew enough of Dan's crib to be certain that, if an attempt was made to arrest a noted character, there would be a struggle, and possibly bloodshed; and we had seen too many desperate battles not to know that a shot can be fired by a pretended friend with more coolness than an enemy, and no one the wiser for it. I scrutinized Steel Spring's face to see if I could read his thoughts, but nature had given him eyes of such a peculiar hue and shape that I was baffled in my attempt.

"Do you mean honestly to assist us if we agree to your plans?" I asked.

"So help me Heaven," he cried; and one of his hands was raised as though swearing to the truth of his words.

"We want no oaths, because we know the value that you place upon them; but let me impress upon your mind that to-morrow night we will accompany you — that each of us intends to carry a revolver, (and you know what execution we can do with them,) and the first shot fired shall be at your body if we see any signs of treachery. Now go, and meet us to-morrow night at any time you see proper."

I opened the door as Fred ceased speaking, and, with a thoughtful brow, Steel Spring passed out of the room, and was soon lost to view as he skulked homeward.

CHAPTER LV.

Adventures at Dan Brian's Drinking-house.

The next day, anxious to test the truth of Steel Spring's statements, I made an inquiry at the government reception office, and referring to the books a clerk informed me that on the very day before the attack was made upon Mr. Critchet he had deposited one thousand ounces of gold, and had received a stationary certificate, or note, acknowledging that the money had been received, but was to lay in the office, and not be forwarded to Melbourne — a method that was often adopted to prevent loss by miners.

This was good news to me, and I felt warranted in calling upon the commissioner to let him understand the fact, as it would in a measure relieve us of suspicion of being implicated in the robbery.

Mr. Sherwin received me with more kindness, or pretended friendship, than I thought him capable of, and invited me into his private room, an apartment about the size of a sugar box, and about as rough. It contained two chairs, a desk, and a pair of old boots, much the worse for wear.

Upon the rough wall of the office was a portrait of Queen Victoria in her coronation robes, done in yellow, and dear at any price. On the desk was a print of Hobart Town, and beneath it was a black profile of the commissioner; at least, he informed me that it was intended as

a surprising likeness of him, but I thought it would astonish no one but his mother, in case the old lady ever saw it. It was cut from a piece of black paper by a man who was before him for being drunk, and had no funds to pay his fine, and so thought to conciliate his judge, which he succeeded in doing, if report was true.

After I had sufficiently admired the contour of the head, and the other striking features of the paper counterfeit, Mr. Sherwin invited me to be seated, and asked what I would "take," and appeared to be somewhat surprised when I told him that I didn't care about drinking.

Notwithstanding my refusal, the commissioner unlocked his desk and took out two very dirty wine glasses, and then displayed, with a solemn flourish, a black bottle partly filled with a dark liquid which he called wine; but I would have sworn, without tasting that it was bilge water.

"Now," said Mr. Sherwin, waving me to a seat opposite to the desk, "we can be comfortable and chatty. We have wine and good fellowship, and what more can we desire?

"And how is our friend Frederick?" the commissioner inquired, after filling the glasses and re-corking the bottle, as though he feared the strength of the black stuff would evaporate if left exposed to the air.

I replied that my friend and companion was as "well as could be expected" with such an accusation hanging over his head, and that he would have accompanied me had his presence not have been needed at the store to wait on customers, and to attend to the wants of the wounded man, Mr. Critchet.

"Don't give yourselves any uneasiness on that silly charge," the commissioner said, with a smile that was intended to be engaging, but I shuddered at it, it was so cold and fiendish. "I am perfectly satisfied that Follet lied to me, and any time you wish to proceed against him for perjury I will grant a warrant, and will also release you and your friend from bail."

"May I ask what has caused such a change in your sentiments?" I inquired, half suspecting that he was setting a trap for me.

"You know as well as I do," my companion answered, with a wink of his snaky eye.

I protested with some earnestness that I was ignorant on the subject, and while the commissioner turned his back to search amidst some papers which his desk contained, I slyly poured the contents of my wine glass through a crack of the floor, and watered the soil of Ballarat with a new species of liquor, such as was never known before.

"You see I have heard from Melbourne lately, and am satisfied how the land lays, and I am not going to weaken the cause of government by suspecting two of its greatest defenders." And while the plotting officer unfolded a letter his eye fell upon my empty glass, and, in defiance of my most strenuous denials, insisted that I should "not be afraid of the liquor, because there was plenty more where that came from," (which the Lord forbid!) and once more I had the inexpressible misery of sitting with a wine glass full of the strange compound under my nostrils, which I dared not throw away, fearful that he would see me, and which I dreaded to drink.

"I got a letter from Mr. Murden, who is an officer of some rank in

the police force at Melbourne, a day or two since, and he tells me that I must be very careful of you gentlemen, as the governor esteems you highly, and that his excellency would be apt to resent an act of injustice done you while stopping at the mines."

I strongly suspected that the lieutenant had drawn on his imagination in that letter, for he thoroughly understood the character of the commissioner, and disliked him so much that while at Ballarat he had not even called upon him.

"When I obtain a position at Melbourne that I consider suitable for a fair display of my talents, I shall know how to be grateful for favors," the commissioner insinuated, with a bland smile that suggested whole volumes of bribery.

The subject was painful to me, and to avoid making promises which I could not perform, I turned the conversation to the theme which I had uppermost in my mind, — the discovery of Mr. Critchet's deposit at the government office. The commissioner was slightly astonished, and became more and more convinced that Fred and myself were innocent of any complicity in the plot.

"In fact," Mr. Sherwin said, "so convinced am I that Follet and an unknown companion attempted the murder, that I shall this day order a full discharge from our court records, and of course you will no longer be under bail. Nay, I don't desire thanks," the commissioner said, hastily, as I attempted to explain how grateful we should feel. "There are other ways besides words in which a man can certify his good will."

I understood his meaning, but instead of returning an answer I managed to empty his so-called wine upon the floor, and then took my leave, after first hinting that we were on the track of Follet's companion. I felt easier and breathed freer after reaching the open air, in defiance of the dust, which filled the heavens, and almost blinded me; and while I was picking my way through the street, with half-closed eyes, whom should I meet but Mr. Brown.

"Hullo," he shouted, "what is up?"

I briefly related the manner in which I had been received by the commissioner, and the discovery that Steel Spring had made.

"And when does that long-limbed wretch propose to identify Follet's companion, so that we can get hold of him?" Mr. Brown inquired.

"To-night," I answered; "I intended to find you in the course of the day, and get you to accompany us on the expedition."

"What time do you start?"

"About midnight. Steel Spring is to be at Dan's, and will introduce us to the company as men afraid to look upon the face of a 'Trap,' and 'on the square.'"

"I'll be with you before you start, and during the day I'll send two disguises to the store which will be hard to rival in point of ugliness. Good by for the present, and don't forget to examine and clean your revolvers, for we may need them."

At about midnight we donned our disguises, and then surveyed each other with attention. Fred had a close-cropped wig of a fiery red color, which nearly covered his forehead, and made him look like a prize-fighter after a hard battle.

On his nose was stuck an immense piece of adhesive plaster, which rather detracted from his personal beauty; and to complete the adornment of his person, there were other strips of the same material on his face, which, by the way, was slightly smeared with dirt to give him a healthy color, so that the company which we were about to seek should not accuse us of aristocracy in being too clean.

I also had on a wig, but it was one of the *fussy* kind, and made my head look as though guiltless of a comb or brush for many months. To beautify my complexion I smeared it over with soot, and when I regaled myself with a glance at our six by nine glass, I was satisfied that no living man could tell whether I was a dirty white man or a dirty negro.

Our costumes consisted of blue flannel shirts, with coarse canvas trousers, very much soiled and very stiff; but they were made loose, with very deep pockets, for the express purpose of carrying a brace of pistols or huge pocket knives.

A few minutes past twelve o'clock the inspector gave his peculiar knock, and we admitted him. He had on a suit of clothing that formerly belonged to a miner who had passed two or three weeks under ground digging through a stratum of clay, and of course he had not spared his garments, for they were so besmeared that it would have puzzled a conjurer to have defined the original color of the cloth. His wig was black, and contrasted with his saturnine complexion, and as long as he held his tongue he would have passed muster as a native of Italy.

"Well," inquired Mr. Brown, surveying our disguise with approval, "is every thing ready?"

We assured him that, as far as we were concerned, we were, and impatient to set out without delay.

"Where is Steel Spring?" Mr. Brown asked, while sipping his punch, with a gratified expression upon his face that showed how highly he enjoyed it.

"We are to meet him at Dan's at one o'clock."

"Then we had better be moving," the inspector said, emptying his glass, and rising. "I heard from one of my folks to-night, and he tells me that the gathering is unusually large at the 'Cricket,' and to prevent mistakes, I have stationed a small force of trusty men within sound of a call in case they are required."

We left Rover in charge of the store and the sick man, and locked up, and then picked our way towards Gravel Pit Hill, where the "Cricket" was located.

Mr. Brown was in high spirits, and once called down the wrath of a guardian of the night because Mr. B. insisted upon showing us the extent and volume of his voice.

At length we gained "Gravel Pit Hill," and had no difficulty in finding the celebrated "Cricket," — a house that made some pretensions to size and boards, for it was two stories high, with a large hall, or bar-room, on the first floor, and three or four smaller rooms leading from it. The small rooms were for the *elite* of the bushranging profession, and when there was too great a cry for a notorious robber, he was accommodated with private quarters where he could enjoy his *lush*

undisturbed by the thoughts of police officers. The "Cricket" appeared to be unusually light and brilliant, for the sharp squeaking of a violin was heard, and the trilling of a clarinet blended with the catgut in most discordant notes.

"Now, gentlemen," the inspector said, stopping short, and laying his hands upon our arms, "we have got to manage this matter with some skill, or we shall hardly escape without a blow from a knife, or a pistol shot, two very desirable things if we use the weapons with which they are inflicted, but bad if in other hands. Let me caution you to study each word that you utter, and to maintain perfect control over your muscles. Now, then, are you ready?"

We answered in the affirmative, and once more strode on until we reached the stout door that separated the "cricketers" from the outer world. It was closed as we expected, for Steel Spring had informed us that after a certain hour at night all ingress had to be made by giving a password, and he had kindly provided us with the magic expression to be used.

Mr. Brown dealt a stout blow upon the door, and while we listened for a response the music ceased, and all was quiet as a churchyard within the house. We could hear whispering near the door as though debating our business, and who we were.

Again did the inspector deal the door heavy blows, and while he rested a hoarse voice asked, —

"What's wanted out there?"

"We wish to come in — open the door, and don't keep us away from the lush all night," responded the inspector.

"But who are you?" queried our interrogator.

"We is fakey kens and quiddling coves," Mr. Brown answered, adopting the flash language, most in vogue among thieves at Ballarat.

"If you is fakey coves you should know the *dig*," was the response, meaning that we should know the password.

"Bush and bush," cried Mr. Brown, promptly, being the words which Steel Spring had informed us would carry us into the house without delay.

"Why didn't you go for to say so in the fust place," growled the doorkeeper; and we heard a heavy bar removed, and a bolt drawn, and then the door was opened just wide enough for us to squeeze in one by one, and after we stood in the large room, where twenty or thirty persons were congregated, it was instantly shut, and again secured, and our retreat was cut off had we been disposed to have left the choice company before us in a summary manner.

I had time to glance around the apartment and take a brief survey of the assembly before the ruffian who guarded the door had bolted it, and I must confess that my impression was not very favorable. As I said before, there were between twenty and thirty persons in the room, all with such villanous-looking countenances that a jury would have hanged them without a word of evidence in regard to their guilt. The very *creme de la creme* of scoundrelism was before us, plotting a recruiting from deeds of crime, and ready to cut a man's throat for a pound.

The apartment was filled with smoke, for each man had a clay pipe in his mouth, and was puffing away in a state of great enjoyment.

Along the walls of the room were common pine tables, with rude benches and but a few rough chairs. The tables were nailed to the floor, or confined by iron staples; and I afterwards learned that the plan was adopted by the proprietor of the house to save his property, as sometimes his guests got angry, and were in the habit of breaking chairs over the heads of adversaries — a custom which had been discontinued, owing to the shrewdness of Dan in looking after number one. Of course, the knife and pistol were the next resort; but that was a matter of the most supreme indifference to Dan, who didn't care how many were killed or wounded as long as they didn't injure him or what belonged to him.

Every man was drinking, or had a pot of ale or a glass of rum before him; and in one corner of the apartment were half a dozen persons asleep, or else dead drunk, and even beside them were glasses or pewter cups.

At the farthest end of the room from the street was a small bar, behind which Dan, with coat off and shirt sleeves rolled up, was the presiding genius, and to show his aristocracy was smoking a cigar.

He scanned us with his sharp black eyes when we entered, as though wondering who we were; but apparently satisfied that we were "kenkly coves," or first-class thieves, he turned his attention to more congenial matters, and refreshed his inner man with a stiff glass of rum, diluted with but a slight mixture of water.

The musicians, who had stopped playing upon our knocking, now made feeble signs of renewing their duties; but still the guests assembled did not remove their eyes from us, and we could see a number of them whisper to each other as though making inquiries as to whom we were.

I glanced around the room in hope of seeing Steel Spring, but that worthy was invisible; and I was just about to utter an anathema on his head when a door leading to the hall, or bar-room, opened, and that individual made his appearance. He stopped for a moment to exchange a few words with Dan, and we could see that he was requesting the favor of a drink, and that he was promptly served, a sure sign that his credit was good, or that he had not run out of money.

CHAPTER LVI.

Adventures continued.

"Come, ain't you covies agoing to move along and get some lush, or is you goin' to stand here all night, and hanged to you?" cried the doorkeeper, who had secured the door, and wanted to turn his attention to any amusement that might be going on, including that of being asked to drink by any good-natured bushranger present.

"Don't you be in a hurry, you old grampus," cried Mr. Brown, with

a swagger and an indifferent look, as though he had been used to just such society as was present. "We are strangers here, but we have lived in the hush for a few years, and knows a 'Trap' from an innocent."

To even claim the title of a bushranger was sufficient to secure respect from the common thieves who congregated around Ballarat, as there was so much danger connected with the pursuit of a robber who was ohliged to live in the bush, and rarely show his face, except to attack a train, that petty knaves were always awed when one of the fierce rovers of the prairies made his appearance and condescended to speak. The doorkeeper's manners underwent an instantaneous change, and from the fierce bully he softened to the fawning panderer.

"I axes yer pardon, gents, 'cos I didn't know ye, and 'sposed you was sneaks from Melbourne. Let me show you to a table, and supply you with lush, and (here the fellow's voice subsided to a whisper) I knows the bottles that holds the best rum."

"You're the fellow for us," cried the inspector, slapping him on his back with pretended frankness. "Bring on the lush, and hang the expense. We're in for a time, and a jolly one at that."

Our cicerone led us across the room, and while we were walking every eye was upon us, and the least hesitancy or timidity would have betrayed and brought the whole pack upon us before we were ready to receive them. Therefore, without swaggering, or pretending to be very independent, we reached our allotted table, and called for three bottles of ale and three pipes.

Just then Dan called Steel Spring's attention, and we could hear him inquire in a whisper if he knew us. The long-legged scamp turned deliberately around, pretended to be surprised, hastily swallowed his rum, and then rushed towards us.

"Vel, if this isn't a surprise may I never speak again, or make an honest living vhile in the bush. To think that three of my old pals should turn up jist as I vanted 'um, is a vonderful thing and no mistake. If ye axes me vat I'll drink, I shall say rum."

We all pretended to be pleased to see the fellow, and gave him such a rough welcome as we deemed his companions would be likely to bestow, and then, to his extreme gratification, ordered the rum that he was so eager to taste.

"It's all right," we could hear the ruffians, by whom we were surrounded, say. "Steel Spring knows 'um, and that's 'nough;" and then each man applied himself with renewed energy to drinking and smoking, and laying plans for future robberies.

"I should never have known you," Steel Spring whispered, "if you hadn't have peached about the toggles vot you vas going to vare. I don't believe that your blessed mother would know you, and as for your fathers they would be puzzled at any rate."

This was uttered in a whisper, and while the doorkeeper was gone for the rum and ale; and I suppose it was intended to be complimentary, although we didn't look upon it in that light.

"Is he here?" I asked, glancing around the room, and endeavoring to imagine which of those present was the assassin.

"Yes, it's all right; but I can't point him out, 'cos it would attract attention. Keep quiet, and drink your hale in peace."

We were constrained to follow Steel Spring's advice, although I promised him a kicking for his impudence.

"Jim," cried a black bearded fellow who sat near us, and who, Mr. Brown whispered, had served six years as a convict, and who preferred Australia to the old country, "when is you going to try your hand at the trade agin?"

"Not until the brads get low, and when Dan refuses to trust me for lush and grub," was the answer.

"Isn't it a pity that I haven't got the power to arrest these fellows, and hang them without a trial? They deserve punishment, yet there is no evidence by which they can be convicted. Your California lynch law would work wonders here in a short time."

The inspector felt as enthusiastic as an artist in the presence of a great painting, and Steel Spring was obliged to whisper a few words of caution for fear of a discovery.

The doorkeeper brought our drink, and expressed great gratification when we asked him to take a drop at our expense; but Dan, who was watching the operation, looked much more pleased when he saw Fred display a few gold pieces, and pay for the same; and at length the reserve of the landlord wore off, and seeing that we were strangers and had money, he made an excuse to call at our table, and grunt forth a few words of welcome.

"Is you from the town or bush?" he asked, appealing to Fred as the leader, because I suppose he had on better clothes than the inspector and myself.

"From the town; but on the lookout for a chance for the bush," my friend returned.

"Whose gang have you faked with?" was the next interrogation.

"Once we were with Black Darnley; but most of the time we have been together, picking up odds and ends, not making big strides, for fear of the Traps. We are getting short, and came here 'cos we were told that Steel Spring was going into business, and wanted a little help."

If Dan had any suspicions that we were not what we seemed, he kept them to himself at any rate, for after drinking "confusion to all d——d Traps," he returned to his old place behind the bar, and left us to do what we pleased. We were glad to get rid of him, for he had a wicked eye, and could see through a disguise quicker than any other man in Ballarat, robber or policeman. I afterwards accused Mr. Brown of giving him some private signal by which he was warned to hold his tongue, but the inspector denied it, not so emphatic as I could have wished, however.

"Go and invite your friend to join us," Mr. Brown said, addressing Steel Spring, for the night began to wear away. "If we are to pull together, we want to see what kind of stuff a man's made of, so that we can know what risks to run and what to avoid. Them's my sentiments, and I don't care a d—— who knows 'um."

This was spoken in a tone of voice loud enough for half a dozen thieves to hear; and as Steel Spring had given out that he was intending to raise a gang, they did not any longer feel suspicious as to our movements.

"That's the kind of talk I like a man to spit out," cried a huge black

ruffian who sat near us, bringing his hand down upon his table with so much good will that a cup before him spilled out half its contents. "I like to 'sociate with men who have pluck, and know what they is about. D——n a coward, dead or alive," and with this emphatic declaration the ruffian drank what spirits remained in his cup, and then called for more.

"That's Tom Benchley," whispered the inspector, "and in spite of his big words and fierce looks, an arrant coward at heart. He frightens people by bouncing, although a boy of twenty could make him eat his words. You see that he sits alone. Most of those in the room consider him a disgrace to what they call a profession; but the fellow always has money, and so Dan gives him the right of *entrée* to the select scenes."

Steel Spring, who had been to the farther end of the room, whispering with a young man, now returned, and introduced him to us as Ben Jackson. He was not more than twenty-four years of age; and I saw in a moment that he had never passed any portion of his time at the hulks, and that if he had ever been engaged in robberies it was only recently, and that he was not yet quite hardened to crime.

"Gents," said Steel Spring, waving his hand with an attempt to do the genteel, "allow me to introduce Mr. Jackson, a covey vot is desirous of jining our select society, provided, as the land sharks say, you is villing."

Jackson appeared delighted with the introduction; although I thought that I could detect a slight look of disgust upon his face when we extended our soiled hands and shook his white palm.

"Our friend tells the truth — I want to join a gang where I can make money, and then leave the country without danger. I don't want to stop in Australia all my days by a d——d sight."

Even the profanity was forced, and did not come from his heart. He considered it necessary to use an oath to make himself appear an adept in crime — but I saw through the disguise, and pitied him.

"It ain't every man that applies for a chance can jine with us," the inspector answered, assuming a deep and bass tone of voice, and language suited to his supposed condition. "We want men — half a dozen good, firm men, and then we can roll the money in without much trouble. Squat yourself, and then we can think of this 'ere subject, and find out what you can do to help us when we reach the bush."

"I like to meet men, and hope to prove myself one before we part," speaking in a manner that showed he was not destitute of education. "I've never been in the bush, but I hope under good guidance I shall soon be, and then if I show a white feather I'll agree to go without my share of the prize money."

"That's fair talk," I muttered, "and I think that the kid will make a goat. Let's trust him."

"I'm sure I'm very much pleased with your favorable opinion, and I hope I shall deserve it. I've already done some things that can't be beat, although I'm not in the possession of much money. Gentlemen, I must ask you to drink at my expense, if I can manage to negotiate with Dan for credit."

Jackson started for a short conference with the barkeeper, and Steel Spring whispered to the inspector to "draw him out, and hear him talk."

Dan apparently required some persuasion to give credit, but at length the representations of Jackson prevailed, and he returned to us radiant.

"The d——d old '*fence*,'" he muttered, "he is afraid of giving credit as a churchman, and nearly as mean. The next time I'm in Ballarat, I hope that I shall have money enough to pay for select lodgings, and then he and his 'Cricket' may go to the devil. What are you going to take?"

We ordered our liquor, and after it was brought made a show of tasting it, but we knew better than to drink spirit at the Cricket.

"By the way," Mr. Brown said, "you was saying something about your not being green, and that you had tried your hand at one or two things. Now, if you have no objections, we should like to know how you've been employed, so that we can judge of your mettle."

The young fellow paused; and I could see that shame was not entirely banished from his heart, for he colored, and then endeavored to crush his feelings with a drink of poisonous spirit.

"What need I care," he exclaimed, at length, a "short life and a merry one for me. A fellow may as well be dead as destitute of money, and when it can't be got by hard work, I'm in favor of taking it wherever I can get it."

"Them's the sentiments," cried the inspector, and then muttered in an undertone, "that have hanged better men than you."

"You see, gentlemen," Jackson continued, the liquor opening his heart, and making him loquacious, "that I began life in Liverpool, in the old country. I was apprenticed to a grocer, but I looked upon weighing coffee and tea as not the kind of employment for a man; so one day I stepped out of the store on board of a ship that was just ready to sail for Melbourne, and started to seek my fortune in this part of the world."

"Didn't you have any capital to begin with?" interrogated the inspector, with a wink of encouragement.

"Well, yes," hesitated the young fellow; "I forgot to say that I had five hundred sovereigns in my pocket at the time I left; and they were intrusted to me by my master to put into the Bank of Liverpool."

"Ah, that was something like," cried the inspector, rubbing his hands. "How old Slocum must have been astonished when he found that you was gone."

"You knew my master, then," cried Jackson, starting up with alarm depicted upon his countenance.

"Of course I didn't know him; but I can read, can't I? Didn't an advertisement appear in one of the papers at Melbourne, offering a reward for the arrest of one Charley Wright. But don't fear us; go on with your yarn. You've made a good beginning."

"I'm glad that you think so, 'cos I don't know as you'd approve of such kinds of pickings."

"Approve of 'em?" echoed the inspector. "No matter; you go on, and while talking I'll order more lush."

"I didn't find so many chances to make a fortune as I expected here," Jackson continued, "but I got employment in a store, where I worked daytimes, and at night I used to do a little on my own account in the

pasteboard line; but I wasn't very successful, and somehow or other I think I was cheated."

"It's exceedingly probable," cried the inspector, *sotto voce.*

"And when I found that I was cleaned out after a few weeks, I attempted to retrieve my losses by borrowing from my employers," Jackson continued.

"Without their consent or knowledge," Mr. Brown remarked.

The young fellow smiled faintly, and nodded his head in token of assent, and then continued:

"One day I borrowed a hundred pounds, thinking that I could replace it without its being missed, if I was lucky at cards; but somehow I wasn't, and my employers began to make a stir in relation to the matter."

"That must have been exceedingly disagreeable to your feelings," the inspector insinuated.

"Well, it was rather hard, I will own, 'cos I might have been lucky after a while, and then I could have paid the whole debt without trouble; but men in business don't seem to have much consideration for their clerks; and I think that a good deal of crime originates through their obstinacy and stupidity.

"I was obliged to leave the firm with whom I was spending my time; and I did it so suddenly that they had no chance to arrest me, or to investigate matters. I stepped out of the store while the partners were holding a consultation, and in ten minutes time I was on board the 'Smiling Queen' steamboat, bound for Sydney, and beyond the reach of the police.

"I didn't have a recommendation in my pocket, for I didn't think to ask for one when I left Melbourne; and I have always entertained some doubts as to whether I could have obtained one had I requested it."

"Ingenuous youth," muttered the inspector, almost fascinated by his impudence.

"I tried to get a clerkship in Sydney, but didn't succeed; and then I accepted a situation as marker in a billiard saloon, where I flourished for a time — but one night a miner, who had been drinking quite freely, lost about a pound of dust, and was fool enough to make a fuss about it. I was suspected of stealing it; and although I pledged my word that I knew nothing of the matter, yet the gold was found in my pocket, and I was obliged to share with the police in order to get clear."

Mr. Brown endeavored to hide his chagrin by drinking from his glass, while Steel Spring could hardly contain himself he was so delighted at the *exposé.*

"A precious set of wermin those police fellers, hey?" cried the scamp, in defiance of all my frowns.

"O, they are the most rapacious set of villains," Jackson continued, "that ever lived. A man can't do an honest day's work without sharing with them. I know 'em, thoroughly."

"Perhaps you do," Mr. Brown replied, carelessly, and at the same time he gave Steel Spring such a tremendous kick on his thin shin bone that the poor devil was almost bent up double with agony.

"I ax your pardon," cried Mr. Brown; "I didn't know that your foot was there."

"Vell, you've found out," was the reply of the poor devil, as he rubbed his leg.

"After the transaction with the miner, I heard that a man could make a good living, if he was any ways smart, at Ballarat, so I came here and done pretty well, until an unfortunate occurrence took place, which has been the means of making me fight shy for a few weeks past."

"You see he used a 'sticker' rather freely," cried Steel Spring, in a careless way, as though stabbing was a meritorious act, which Jackson's modesty was too great for him to disclose.

"I thought I asked you to say nothing of the matter!" exclaimed Jackson, with a pallid cheek, and a frightened expression.

"Vell, so you did, but vat of it? Ain't ve all friends; and ain't it right that ve should know how much pluck a man has got?"

"If the gentleman has done any thing that is gallus, let's hear it," grumbled Fred.

"Ah, that's the talk; out with it at once," we all exclaimed, although in so low a tone that our neighbors did not hear us.

"Well, since the subject is broached, I don't mind giving you an account of the most dangerous expedition that I ever undertook; but mum is the word, for if that d——d Brown should get hold of me, I should have to swing for it."

"O, mum it is," we all repeated; and none were louder than the inspector in giving the promise.

"Well, the fact of it is," Jackson continued, "soon after I got here, and began handling the 'pasteboards,' I made the acquaintance of a young fellow who was at work mining with an uncle. I managed to clean him pretty well out; and then he used to steal pretty smart sums from his relative, until at last the old man missed his dust, and remonstrated against such injustice.

"One day, after a hard quarrel, the nephew came to me, and proposed that we should enter his uncle's tent, and take what gold he had left, and divide it equally between us. I didn't like the idea, but my friend was so sanguine that a few thousand pounds could be made without much of an effort, that I at last consented."

"I 'spose you mean that affair of Critchet's," the inspector said. "I could have told you that nothing was to be got in that quarter."

"How — you know of that attempt at mur—— "

He did not finish the sentence, for the word seemed to choke him.

"Know of it?" repeated the inspector; "of course I did. Don't I belong to a gang that hears of all such things? What would an organization be worth unless the news was reported?"

"But you didn't know that I was connected with the matter, did you?"

"Never you mind me — when you belong to the association you will know as much as I do. I'll give you the credit of saying that the job you undertook was well conducted, and only failed through the old fellow's shrewdness. Now drive on, and don't be bashful."

"We agreed upon a night," Jackson continued, "and about one o'clock we crept into old Critchet's tent, and began digging where we supposed the dust was buried, but to our disappointment found it was gone.

"My companion was so enraged that he uttered an exclamation loud enough to awaken his uncle, and he sprang from his bed and shouted for help. We feared that his cries would bring assistance, when we knew that our errand would be suspected, and that our arrest would be certain. We seemed animated by a kindred feeling, and both of our knives struck the old fellow at the same moment. He gave a groan, and fell to the ground, and then, fearing that he was not finished, we dealt half a dozen more stabs, and ran, as fast as our legs could carry us, to a gambling saloon, where we endeavored to forget our disappointment and terror by imbibing deeply of liquor.

"A little before daylight we stole back to the tent, thinking that we would raise an alarm in case he was dead; but we discovered that the old fellow had crept from his tent to a store kept by two Yankees. We tracked him by his blood, and feared that we were lost, but Follet ——"

"Follet was the name of your companion, hey?" Fred asked.

Jackson hesitated for a moment, and then continued, —

"I may as well own that it was, 'cos I'm with friends who won't betray me. Follet said that he would visit the store, and by cross-examining the Yankees, find out what they meant to do, and whether the old man had made any revelations. He did so, and while there managed to drop a knife, which I had bought from them a week or two before, and which I took care to blood up, and then went before the commissioner, and boldly accused them of murdering his uncle.

"The dodge succeeded badly; the d——d fool of a commissioner let the store keepers off on bail, and shoved Follet in jail, to be held as a witness. But he's a good and true one, and has not once alluded to me."

"Is that all?" asked the inspector.

"That's all," replied Jackson, emptying his glass.

"Well, now, let me see your hands," Mr. Brown said.

Jackson held out his hands, which Mr. Brown grasped firmly, and then I heard two sharp "clicks," and to my surprise, and the consternation of our companion, a pair of stout handcuffs were on his wrists, and he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER LVII.

More of the same sort.

The securing of Jackson was so sudden and unexpected that no one in the room besides our party had noticed what was going on, and even the prisoner seemed not to realize for some moments that his tongue had revealed secrets which were likely to cost him imprisonment for life. He appeared to imagine that the handcuffing was an excellent joke, and a faint smile overspread his face; but after finding that no one returned it, a deadly paleness chased the color from his lips, and he

trembled as though he was already arraigned before a tribunal for sentence.

"What is the meaning of this?" he stammered out, after moistening his mouth, which seemed parched, with his tongue.

"It means," whispered the inspector, "that you are my prisoner, and the first effort that you make to escape will result in your death. Remain quiet, and do as I wish you to, and you will fare well, but——"

He pressed the barrel of a revolver against his side, and the fellow trembled at its touch.

"Who are you?" Jackson demanded, almost in an inaudible voice.

"I am that d——d Brown whom you spoke of a few minutes since," replied the inspector, with a chuckle.

"And these two men?" he asked, pointing to Fred and myself.

"The Americans, whom you thought to get convicted of murder. You see that they have played you a Yankee trick, and have rather got the best of the bargain."

The poor wretch's head fell upon his breast, and we supposed that he was completely crushed by his unexpected arrest, but we kept a sharp eye upon his movements, nevertheless, for fear that he should convey intelligence of his situation to the noisy and drunken gang in the room. We knew that the single word "Traps" would cause them to swarm around us like hornets, and that many blows would have to be struck before we could make our way to the street and escape with our prisoner, whom we were desirous of holding on to at every hazard.

"Steel Spring," whispered the inspector, but no Steel Spring was present to respond. The fellow had stolen away unperceived as soon as the handcuffs were put on Jackson's wrists, disliking the idea of fighting his way from the room. The act was characteristic of the man, and we cursed him in our hearts for a coward and a traitor.

Here were but three of us to oppose nearly thirty, and to add to our trouble it was not only necessary that we should get clear ourselves, but that we should take our prisoner with us; and while we knew that in case of a rush we would stand but a slim chance, we determined that we would dispute our lives with the ruffians, and make every shot in our revolvers tell.

"If that coward of a Steel Spring was only here," muttered the inspector.

"He would be of little use to us," I remarked, "for he has not pluck enough to fight a hedgehog, if it showed spirit."

"I expected to send him for the reserved police force that I have posted near at hand. I told them to wait until they got word from me, and they will obey orders."

"It is useless to repine," Fred exclaimed. "Let us make a bold push for the street, and trust to our usual good luck and boldness for an escape."

"Or, had we better sit here until morning, and pretend to drink as hard as those around us? By daylight most of those present will be either drunk or asleep, and then we could get off without much of a struggle."

The advice of the inspector was good, and perhaps we should have adopted it; but just at that moment a burly fellow staggered towards

our table, and seemed determined to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance.

"You coves don't seem to drink as though you liked our lush," he began, steadying himself by holding on to the table with one hand, and pointing to the half-filled glasses before us. "If the liquor isn't good why don't you say so, and be hanged to you," he continued.

We made a short reply that we liked the liquor very much, and was going to drink our share of it as soon as we got some business arranged.

"Well, let us have a rousing drink, and I'll pay for it," our troublesome friend continued, and in spite of our declaration he ordered a pint of whiskey, and then sat down beside us as though he was determined to see that full justice was done to his treat.

I shoved Jackson's hands under the table so that his bracelets could not be seen, and then I held them in that position until the liquor was brought, when a new source of trouble awaited us. It was necessary, to escape without a quarrel, that each of us should honor the unexpected treat by partaking of it; but when it came Jackson's turn to drink, we all protested that he had his reasons for not imbibing, but our troublesome friend overruled them.

"He shall drink, by G—d, or fight," roared the ruffian; and as he spoke we saw, with some misgivings, that our corner of the room was the centre of attraction, and that the sleeping thieves were waking up, and listening to hear what the row was about.

"Sit down, man," cried the inspector, calmly, "and let me drink his share. I'll drink glass after glass with you, until daylight."

"Not by a d——d sight. I want that fellow to respond to my toast: 'Death and confusion to all policemen!'" shouted the ruffian, bringing his glass down upon the table with so much force that it was shivered to pieces, and one of the fragments struck our prisoner on his face, and so startled him that he sprang up, in defiance of the inspector's threat, and revealed what we had attempted to conceal, his confined hands.

The secret was out, and frowns and threats were in vain. We felt in our pockets and satisfied ourselves that our revolvers were ready, and then waited for the astonished ruffian to give an alarm; but he seemed incapable of motion, for he sat staring at Jackson as though hardly daring to believe his eyes.

"Make for the door," whispered the inspector, and grasping the prisoner by his right arm he arose, an example which we followed.

Then did the ruffian, who had insisted upon our drinking with him, find his tongue, for with one spring he cleared the rude bench upon which he was seated and rushed towards his comrades shouting a word, which, above all others, was most dreaded by thieves.

"Traps!" he yelled; and at the sound every thief started to his feet, and even those who were lying in the corners of the room, sleepy and overpowered with drink, sat up and rubbed their eyes, ready to fight in self-defence, or to make an escape, just according to the chances which presented themselves.

"Traps," once more repeated the frightened ruffian, and a dozen voices demanded where they were, while three or four men opened the

shutters of the windows to see if the building was attacked on the outside. Two or three of the most timid disappeared from the room through a small door, which we afterwards learned led through a subterranean passage to a deserted mine, and from thence escape was easy by means of the shaft.

"Where are they?" roared a dozen voices all at once; and as the ruffians asked, we had the disagreeable pleasure of seeing long knives unsheathed and two or three pistols drawn; but even during the confusion we managed to approach the door through which we had entered, and which we prayed to leave without a severe wound.

"There they go — we are betrayed — down with them," were the cries that we heard; but to our satisfaction a man whom we had not counted on rushed between us and the crowd, his voice, clear and ringing, being heard above the din.

"Put up your knives," he shouted, "or you'll bring trouble on me and my house. Let the gentlemen go — it's nothin' but a fadlin' cove they've got, and not a bushman. For the honor of the 'Cricket' don't spill blood here," pleaded Dan Brian, the proprietor.

"Move on," whispered the inspector, "and don't relax your hold of the prisoner. Keep your pistols in your pockets, and don't use them until I set an example."

"It is selling us, Dan Brian, you are," cried half a dozen voices, and there were shouts and oaths of rage at the thought.

"'Pon my honor, I'm not," reiterated Dan; "I never sold a pal in my life, and, by the blessing of God, I won't. It's a poor devil they've got now, of no account to any of us."

"He's a thief, and in the hands of 'Traps,'" shouted one, "and if we let him go without a blow, none of us will be safe."

"That's so," yelled the crowd, and the most violent pushed Dan aside, or attempted to, for the purpose of getting at us.

"We will listen to nothing," roared the ruffians, "until the poor devil is free, and then we will talk until daylight, if it will please the police."

An almost imperceptible signal was exchanged between the inspector and Dan, but to no purpose, for our party continued to retreat, and the others advance, with many menacing gestures, and the only thing that surprised me was the reluctance to use firearms on the part of our enemies. This, I afterwards found, was owing to the fear of bringing a squad of mounted police to the spot, large numbers of whom were constantly patrolling "Gravel Pit Hill" during the night, and the signal for a disturbance would have been the arrest of every one present, simply by surrounding the house and searching the underground passages.

By the time the last demand was made, we were at the door and all ready to take down the bar, when a rush was made towards us, and by the rather dim light I saw a dozen long knives, such as the stockmen of the plains wear in their belts for the purpose of killing cattle, flash from their sheaths, and grasped as though business was intended.

"Keep your backs to the door," cried the inspector, calmly, not at all dismayed by the formidable array against us, "and don't let a man approach within a yard without getting a good shot."

We covered our prisoner in such a manner that he could do us no harm, and then formed in a triangular manner, so that our fronts and

sides would be equally well guarded, then glanced over the excited crowd, in hopes that Dan would array himself on our side — but that enterprising gentleman had suddenly disappeared, and left us to our fate.

"Stand back," shouted the inspector; "it will be the worse for you. There's many of you present who know me, and know that I have a large force of policemen on hand. If you strike a blow, not one of you shall escape justice.

"Unbar the door as quickly as possible," whispered the inspector, after getting through with his threatening speech.

I lifted the heavy gum wood bar from its place, and then raised the latch, expecting that it would yield, but to my surprise it did not — it was locked, and the key in the pocket of the doorkeeper, who had made his escape from the room in company with Dan.

I almost uttered a groan of agony when I made the discovery, and to add to the perplexity of our situation, the ruffians must have understood our case, and known that the key was never left in the lock, for they uttered a discordant and ironical hoot, and then a shout of sardonic laughter.

"For Heaven's sake, don't be all night in getting that door open," cried Fred, nervously, and I will confess that I also partook of the same complaint.

"Now for a rush — cut them to pieces," exclaimed many voices; but I observed that the cries came from those who were farthest from us, and out of the reach of our pistols, which we were forced to display, in hope of keeping the robbers at a respectful distance.

"Is the door unbarred?" asked Mr. Brown, turning half round, and exposing his side to the knives of the crowd, and quick as thought, a man sprang forward to begin the work of bloodshed; but sudden as were his movements, they were anticipated, for I raised the heavy bar, which I had not relinquished, and let it fall upon his head with crushing force.

The poor devil fell at our feet without uttering a groan, although many spasmodic twitchings of his nerves showed that he was not killed outright. His long knife narrowly missed the side of the inspector, and for the first attempt at our annihilation, it was not to be despised.

The wretches uttered yells of rage when they saw their comrade fall, but none seemed inclined to assume the leadership and begin the attack in earnest.

Not one of their motions escaped us, and as long as they were disposed to brandish their knives at a distance, we did not choose to carry matters to extremities; but change of tactics was suddenly resorted to on the part of our opponents, that placed us in no little peril.

All the tumblers, bottles, and decanters of the bar were taken possession of by the savage scoundrels, and the first intimation that we had of the fact was the crushing of a bottle (empty, of course — they were not the sort of men to throw away liquor of any kind) against the door, just above our heads.

The fragments were showered upon our faces and shoulders, but before we had time to consider on the matter another bottle flew past my head, and hit our prisoner upon one of his shoulders, injuring

"Now for a rush — cut them to pieces!" exclaimed many voices; but I observed that the cries came from those who were farthest from us, and out of the reach of our pistols, which we were forced to display, in hope of keeping the robbers at a respectful distance. Page 394.

him so severely that he dropped to the floor as though he had been shot.

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature," cried the inspector, in a calm tone, cocking his pistol; and when he saw an arm raised to hurl another bottle at our heads, he fired. I saw the raised arm fall suddenly, and I fancied that I could hear the pistol ball when it struck, and buried itself amid bone and muscle.

"And are we to be shot down like dogs?" was the indignant question which some one put, and a loud yell of "No," and a rush towards us, was the response.

One ruffian struck at me, and the point of his knife entered my shirt near the left shoulder, and inflicted a slight scratch, or wound — but before he had time to renew the blow, which I escaped by dodging, Mr. Brown had singled him out as a victim, and he fell, with a horrid imprecation upon his lips, dyeing the black and soiled floor with his blood.

Three or four pistol shots were fired, and they were barely sufficient to keep the crowd at a distance, when I heard a movement at the extremity of the room, and through the windows I saw the well-known blue coats and caps of the Ballarat police force pouring into the room.

We raised a shout of welcome, and our cheers were answered by the gallant fellows, who kept crowding in until about thirty were drawn up in line, with their long, heavy pistols presented, and ready for destruction.

The ruffians were seized with a sudden panic, and would have fled, but their retreat was cut off, and there was no chance for escape. Then our leader, Mr. Brown, seemed endued with the importance of a dozen men.

"Down with your knives," he shouted, "or those who refuse shall rue it."

The speech was one of the most unfortunate that ever the inspector made, for our opponents were in that peculiar state where a mild word would have done no harm, and a cross one much injury.

The robbers were, in fact, already conquered, and a policeman might have passed from man to man, and collected every knife and pistol that they possessed without danger, and with but few sullen remarks; but the words of the inspector made them think that no quarter was to be shown, and if that was the case, they might as well sell their lives as dearly as possible.

With this unfortunate impression, the ruffians replied to the inspector's words with a shout which sounded like the roar of a wounded tiger; and then commenced one of the most shocking scenes that I ever witnessed (with one exception) in my life.

The robbers rushed upon the line of policemen with brandished knives, and as they advanced they discharged the few pistols which they carried on their persons, and they made every shot tell, for I saw three or four of the government force give sudden springs, and fall headlong to the floor; and then came the rattling, deadly discharge of the policemen, and I could hear the heavy balls strike on the partition behind me, and send huge splinters from the woodwork, and scatter them upon our heads.

Seven or eight of the robbers fell, mortally wounded, and others, with the blood streaming from their hurts, which only appeared to inflame their courage, once more rushed towards the blue coats in hope of cutting their way through the line, and gaining the secret passage.

But what madness it was to expect to cope with men who carried long sabres, and knew how to use them! The knives of the robbers were powerless against them, and once more the latter were driven back, overpowered, and with half their number disabled.

"Do you surrender?" demanded the inspector.

There was a sullen response in the affirmative, and knives were thrown down, but there was no cringing or supplication for mercy; and the desperadoes only needed a lion-hearted leader to have placed *hors du combat* one half of their enemies present. They were about as full of pluck as English bull-dogs, and about as resolute.

The police, without moving from their positions, re-loaded their pistols, and then two or three of them advanced and collected the discarded knives without resistance. Handcuffs were then placed upon the robbers' wrists, and they were secured in such a manner that escape was impossible.

The victory was won at the expense of three mortally wounded policemen, and four who were only slightly injured, while on the part of our opponents six were dead, eight badly wounded, and four slightly.

During the battle both Fred and myself had abstained from firing a single shot, for we looked upon the affair in the light of a massacre, yet we could not condemn Mr. Brown or his men, for they had acted according to the best of their judgment, and under the sincere impression that our lives were in danger; and so they were; but we felt as though we had rather cut our way through the villains, or have given up our prisoner, than to have caused so much blood to flow, and so many deaths in an affair that interested ourselves alone.

But the battle was ended, and the wounded required attention. We left our prisoner where he had fallen, when knocked down by a bottle, and as he did not move, we supposed that he had fainted from the effect of fear or pain, and that he would soon come to his senses.

We were picking our way across the floor, endeavoring to avoid the pools of blood, when the rough hands of policemen were laid on our shoulders.

"Put out your digets, and on with the darbies," they said, meaning that we should suffer ourselves to be handcuffed, evidently thinking that we were a portion of the gang with whom they had been fighting.

"Don't hinder us, Mike," I replied, addressing the officer, whom I had seen a number of times, and who knew both Fred and myself.

"By the powers, it's hinder ye'll get wid a rope round yer neck. Out wid yer digets, and don't keep us waiting."

I saw that the man was in earnest, and I was surprised — but suddenly I thought of my disguise, and the mystery was explained at once.

"Don't you know your friends when you see them, Mike?" I asked, and while speaking I tore off my wig, revealing my natural hair.

"O, the devil! I axes yer pardon; but who would have thought of

seeing you here? It's funny ye are going from place to place, where the hard knocks are to be had, and no pay for it."

We did not explain to the Celtic gentleman the interest we had in being present, but passed on to where the bodies of the wounded bush-rangers and robbers were lying. Mr. Brown had already sent for the surgeon of the police force, and a squad of men was removing the wounded soldiers who could go on horseback to their quarters, while litters had been ordered to carry off the remainder. No one appeared to care whether the injured robbers were attended to or neglected.

The poor fellows were suffering the most excruciating pain; but they bore their pangs without a murmur, although two or three of them did ask for water, and when it was brought drank eagerly, and appeared thankful for the favor, slight as it was.

Fred and myself made an attempt to examine their wounds; but before we could strip off one of their shirts, we heard a crashing and roaring beneath our feet, and up through the floor streamed clouds of smoke, black and suffocating, as though produced by pitch or tar.

"The house is on fire," cried a dozen voices; and in an instant there was a rush for the doors and windows, and policemen and miners, who had been drawn from their beds by the tumult and confusion, were mixed in a dozen struggling masses, all striving for escape.

"Come back," we shouted, "and save the wounded;" but our words were unheeded. The fire seemed to increase every moment, fanned as it was by a strong breeze, which blew from the south.

The materials of the building were dry, and easily ignited; and we judged that in less than fifteen minutes the house would be one mass of flames.

We expected to hear the robbers moan and shout for assistance; but to our surprise they maintained a stoical silence, and disdained to beg for help.

We heard the inspector call us by name, but we determined to save every wounded man in the room if possible, and therefore returned him no answer.

Carefully, but quickly, we lifted one of the sufferers from the floor, and conveyed him to the nearest window, where a dozen willing hands were stretched out to receive him; but before we could remove a second, the flames burst through at the extremity of the room, near the bar, and the planks of the floor seemed to blister our feet, they were so heated by the fire raging in the cellar.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Convalescence of Mr. Critchet, and our Discharge from the Criminal Docket.

"Do you wish to perish in the building?" cried the inspector, who had made his way through one of the windows in search of us.

"By no means," returned Fred, hurriedly, "but we will not leave until every wounded man is saved."

"You are mad. The building will be a mass of cinders in ten minutes," exclaimed Mr. Brown.

"Five minutes would be sufficient to clear the room, if we only had help," retorted Fred, as cool as though certain of being saved.

The inspector uttered a hoarse growl of displeasure; and as we hurried to perform our duty as men, he sprang to one of the windows where his policemen were drawn up, awaiting his orders, yet not making the first effort to save the building.

"Ho!" he shouted. "Will you be outdone by strangers. Where are my volunteers? Who will help save a wounded enemy?"

For the honor of the blue coats, let it be told that he did not have to speak twice. The men threw away their pistols and powder, and rushed in a body towards the windows, from whence smoke was streaming of a pitchy darkness and suffocating odor. A number seized logs of wood, and dashed them against the door until the lock gave way, and it flew open. All seemed animated by a spirit of rivalry, as to which should perform the most labor in the attempt to save the wounded from a horrid death.

And it was well for us that assistance arrived, for human endurance could go no farther. We felt as though about to suffocate, and should have fallen upon the bodies of those whom we were attempting to save had not the inspector and one of his men carried us forcibly from the room to the open air, where we quickly received aid by the influence of a bottle containing a quantity of Jamaica rum mixed with water.

While we stood watching the burning building, the inspector joined us. His clothes were nearly burned from his back, and his hair was singed to a crisp, yet he made no complaint, nor appeared to regard his numerous burns.

"Rather a narrow escape this time," he said; "a few minutes longer, and you would never have seen that Yankee land which you boast so much about."

"We have to thank you for our rescue, and we will do so when you are prepared to listen," Fred said.

"Then I shall never be ready. Keep your thanks until I have repaid you a small portion of the debt of gratitude which I owe you for my life. I am not forgetful, believe me."

"I suppose that Mike told you about Jackson," Mr. Brown continued, after a moment's silence, during which we stood looking at the fire.

"He did not mention his name," I replied; "he is safe, I trust."

"Yes, his body is saved, but his soul is now before his God, to be judged and punished, or forgiven, as the Omnipotent may decree."

"Dead!" we exclaimed, in astonishment.

"When my men burst the door of the 'Cricket,' they discovered a body lying against it, with handcuffs on. I was referred to, and found that it was Jackson. A pistol ball had passed through his breast, and probably killed him instantly. His body has been taken to the station house with the dead and wounded, where you can see it if you desire."

But we had no desire for such a sight. We had seen bloody deeds enough for one night, and we felt sick at the thought of what had occurred.

We bade the inspector good night, and wended our way home in a thoughtful mood. The death of Jackson, we knew, would not prevent our being declared innocent, for Mr. Brown had heard his confession, as well as Steel Spring, although we knew that the latter would not be believed in a court of justice, even if he did speak the truth, which he was not addicted to.

We reached our store in safety, and found Rover watching by the side of our patient, Mr. Critchet, who appeared to have slept during our absence, and probably never knew that we left him for one of the most dangerous expeditions that we ever ventured on, during a lengthy residence in Australia.

The "Bloody Fight," as it was called, and is called to this day, by those miners who were living at Ballarat at the time of its occurrence, created a profound sensation in the country; and Mr. Brown gained high encomiums for his bravery and good conduct in ridding the country of so many notorious characters at one fell swoop.

The particulars of the *melee* were never strictly inquired into by the government; for to speak plainly, those in authority did not care a straw whether Mr. Brown was justified or not in shooting down the *habitues* of the "Cricket;" and as our names did not appear in connection with the affair, we were not disposed to work against the best friend we had in Ballarat. The inspector was made a lieutenant, and he deserved his promotion, but not for the part he took in the "Bloody Fight," and he had good sense enough to know it. From that dreadful night, Mr. Brown's name was a terror to evil doers; and bushrangers and petty thieves gave our miners a wide berth, as sailors express it.

We changed our clothes after our return home, washed the soot and dirt from our hands and faces, and while we were thus employed a modest rap was heard at the door, and who should enter but Mr. Steel Spring, looking as important, defiant, and boastful as ever.

"I's so glad to know that you is all right — that you is alive and kicking, that it almost takes my breath," the fellow said, sinking gracefully upon a vinegar barrel, and fanning his face with his hat.

"If we are alive, we have no thanks to offer you in return," Fred muttered, rather testily.

"Vell, if here ain't gratitude, and no mistake. After I does all that a cove can do to find the real assassin, and makes him tell his yarn right afore ye, I'm treated — no, I'm not treated, for I've bin here five minutes, and I'm not axed to drink."

We made no response to this gentle hint, but continued our occupation. The fellow watched us in silence, and then began again.

"I'd like to know vot more a cove could do than I've done? Haven't I hobeyed all horders that vas given? Have I spent much dust in my vast researches; and haven't I even had to get drunk to please ye? And now, ven the vork is completed, I is looked at coldly!"

The hypocrite dug his knuckles into his eyes, and attempted to force a tear, but the effort was a failure; he knew it, and attempted to cover his confusion by pretending to sob bitterly.

"Hark you, Mr. Steel Spring," Fred said, "if you can explain why you left us so suddenly, just as we wanted your services, we shall feel inclined to overlook your little faults, and reward you."

"Is that all that you've got agin me?" he asked, quite cheerfully. "Vy, I really began to think that it was something serious — something calculated to hinjure me in the estimation of good fellows."

"Perhaps leaving us to fight our way out of the room was not a serious matter in your estimation, but we think differently," I replied.

"Vy, I left on purpose to save ye; and if I hadn't have gone, vere vould you have been now? Dead as a sheep, and no mistake. It ain't the one vot fights the most is the bravest, and hany military man vill tell you that. I knew vot I'd got to do; so before the fuss began I slipped out by the underground vay, and vent in search of the police fellers, and didn't I bring 'um up in time? I told 'em how to get in, but I didn't care about goin' myself, because I knew that Lieutenant Murden would feel quite aggravated if any thing happened to me; and then the governor would never have pardoned him in permitting me to leave Melbourne."

"But you might have entered with the police, and found out whether we were dead or alive," Fred said.

"Didn't I know that you vas vell able to take care of yourselves; and couldn't I do more good outside, vatching that none escaped? You come to think of the matter for a minute, and you vill see that I vos right, and you vos wrong."

We did not care to argue the matter with the fellow, for we knew too well that he could lie faster than we could think; although, to do Steel Spring justice, I will state that he sent the police to our assistance, but it was by accident, and not by design.

When he found that trouble was likely to arise between our party and the bushrangers, he slipped quietly away from the table, and escaped from the building by means of the subterraneous passage.

The instant he emerged from under ground he started on a run, with no definite idea of where he was going to; although I always thought that he intended to pay our store a visit during our absence.

He had not gone far before he ran into a squad of policemen, who were lying in ambush, awaiting the inspector's orders; and as the guardians of the night were about to confine him as a suspicious person, he suddenly bethought him that he could benefit us and himself at the same time. He told of the danger that Mr. Brown was in, and urged a rapid movement for his relief.

The sergeant, who had charge of the men, had been told by the inspector, that a person answering Steel Spring's description would be

sent to them when their services were wanted; and without doubting that every thing was right, they stole forward as quickly as possible, but arrived none too soon, as the reader will admit.

The sergeant of the force tried the front door, but it was locked, and all attempts to enter by that way were useless.

Just then the bottles crashed against it, and Mr. Brown's voice was heard loud above the confusion.

That quickened the movements of the men amazingly; and although Steel Spring was watching an opportunity to run away the second time, yet he did find sufficient voice to suggest an entrance by the windows. It was necessary, however, to find articles to stand on, as the windows were eight feet from the ground; but even that difficulty was speedily overcome, by taking a number of dry goods boxes and empty rum barrels, which belonged to a grocer's store near at hand, and which the enterprising proprietor had left out over night.

By their aid an entrance was effected, and we were saved, but at an enormous sacrifice of life.

As soon as the police disappeared, Steel Spring, who never had much love for the smell of gunpowder, speedily retreated to a safe distance, and, no doubt, laughed in his false heart, at the struggle which was taking place, for he never appeared to experience much regret at the slaughter; and I suppose if we had been killed, he would have plundered our store, and then fired it, and ran away by its light.

"What do you intend to do now, that you have finished our job?" I asked of Steel Spring, after he had refreshed his inner man with a drink of what he most loved on earth.

"I start for Melbourne within an hour," he answered promptly.

"Why do you leave so suddenly?" I inquired.

"I has my reasons, but I don't mind telling 'em to you. In the first place, three or four fellers made their 'scape from the 'Cricket' afore the fighting began, and it's quite likely that my company vill be desired by the gents, on the ground that I vos the one vot betrayed 'em. I know that you will consider it strange that such an idea should exist, and any one wid half a knowledge of my character vould laugh at the thought; but I think that the best vay to save my life vould be to step out vile I am hable, and so prevent mistakes."

"And what reward do you require for your valuable services?" I demanded, after commending him for his prudence in leaving town so soon, to escape the thrust of a long knife, or a pistol shot.

"Vell, I's one of the most bashful men in that respect that ever lived, and couldn't think of naming a sum, and should be glad to make you a present of the trifle, but money is a scarce article vid me, and so say fifty pounds, and don't think that I'm hard on ye."

We made no objection to the proposed sum; and while Fred was counting out his money in sovereigns, for Steel Spring entertained a profound disgust for gold dust, because he couldn't pay for drinks without a loss to himself, I sat down and scribbled a few lines to Murden, telling him the result of our expedition, and thanking him for the kind, but somewhat deceptive letter which he had forwarded to the commissioner, relative to ourselves, and after intrusting the missive to Steel Spring, and loading him with provisions sufficient to last him to

Melbourne, we saw him start on his journey, profuse in his thanks, and loud in his professions of leading as honest a life as his near connection with the police would let him.

The next day we saw the commissioner in company with Mr. Brown, and re-told the story which Jackson had told previous to his death. Mr. Sherwin professed that he was entirely satisfied of our innocence, ordered our names to be struck from the docket, and excused our bondsman (the inspector) from being responsible for our appearance, but insisted upon retaining Follet in custody until his uncle's injuries terminated one way or the other.

He was not kept long in suspense, for the morning after our visit, very unexpectedly, Mr. Critchet opened his eyes, and began talking in a rational manner; and although he was weak from the effect of his fever, yet he gained strength sufficient in two days to sit up, and give a clear and impartial account of the attempt to rob and murder him.

I remember the day on which his recovery was dated. I was sitting by Mr. Critchet's side, while Fred was dozing away the afternoon in the shop. The invalid opened his eyes, looked around the room in which he was lying, and then stared at me in some astonishment, as though wondering how it happened that he had been sleeping under the roof of a house, instead of his tent.

"How came I here?" he asked, raising himself from a recumbent position, and sitting up. He did not notice, at first, the many bandages which were bound around his arms and shoulders.

"I will explain all to you in a few days," I replied; "at present, you are too weak to listen to me."

"I am not too weak," the old man exclaimed, imperiously, as though accustomed to have his own way all his life time; "why should I grow weak in a single night? answer me that, if you can!"

"I don't wish to answer you now, for I fear that you cannot submit to excitement. Keep quiet for a few days, and then you shall know all," I answered, soothingly.

"There is some mystery connected with my being here that I must and will solve. Where is my nephew? Where——"

He stopped suddenly, and seemed to recollect something, for, after remaining silent for a few moments, he extended his hand, pressed my own, and then fell back upon his pillow.

"I know all," he murmured, in a low voice; "my memory is perfect from the time that I was attacked in my tent, to the hour when I fell fainting upon your doorstep."

"Do not agitate yourself," I whispered; "in a few days you will be strong enough to talk, and then all matters will be set right."

"I have no desire to proceed against my nephew," Mr. Critchet began, "for the part he has taken in this matter. He is a bad youth, and will some day be punished for his crime. I have attempted to make an honest man of him, and have signally failed. I expected as much, yet I am glad that his hand was raised against me, instead of one less capable of forgiving. He is my sister's child, and I promised to act a father's part towards him. I shall do so, by attempting to procure his discharge, and supplying him with money sufficient to reach some other

portion of the country, where his crimes and character are unknown. Peace go with him — I have no desire to see him more."

"Those are the sentiments of a Christian," I remarked.

"They are the feelings of a man and a relative," he exclaimed, hastily.

We made no reply, and he continued, —

"I had often remonstrated with my nephew against keeping late hours, and in relation to the company that he was in the habit of associating with, but my remarks were unheeded; and then I bethought me that I had a large amount of gold which should be consigned to a more secure place than my tent; and it was but a few days after I deposited it at the government office, that I was awakened by hearing whispering in my tent. I sprang from my bed, and as I did so, I heard Follet say, 'Kill him.' I was instantly struck with a sharp-pointed knife, and as I grappled with my enemies, I called upon my nephew to spare me.

"Half a dozen blows were showered upon me in answer, and then I fell, fainting, and revived just sufficiently to crawl to your store, and by that means, I have no doubt, my life was saved; although, if I had supposed that you were to be involved, I think that I should have remained in my tent, and expired without making known my condition. I am grateful for your kindness to me, and will some day show you how highly I appreciate it."

We would not allow him to talk more, and even if he had been so disposed we could not have stopped to listen, for a whip was cracked in front of the store like the report of a pistol, and then we heard Smith's voice, shouting, in no gentle terms, to his oxen.

CHAPTER LIX.

Our Teamster Barney, and his Wife.

The burly form and red face of our partner was never more welcome, for our stock of goods was run low, and our good credit required that we should have an assortment on hand second to none in the town. We had already a reputation with the miners for keeping articles of the best quality, and our prices seemed to give better satisfaction than the rates of any other storekeepers.

We grasped our diligent partner by his huge, hard hand, and welcomed him to our home, and asked a dozen questions in a minute, regarding the state of the markets in Melbourne — whether he had got a package of letters for us — how many newspapers he had with him — whether the roads were safe — and a dozen other matters were touched on, that required all of Smith's patience and lungs to attend to.

"Just you hold on a minute," he said, "until I can get my cattle unyoked, and then I will attend to you and your questions."

We did not wait for him to carry his request into effect, for we lent

him a helping hand with the cattle, although, to tell the truth, the animals did not seem in the least grateful for the assistance, and attempted, with their long horns, to transfix certain portions of our anatomy that we were not disposed to have injured. At length, however, the animals were turned loose, and then Smith was at liberty to reply to our interrogations.

"In the first place, I've got a dozen or twenty letters, and about the same number of newspapers from the States. I'll tell you how I fixed it."

"But the papers?" we cried.

"I'm coming to 'em as fast as I can. Just as I got into Melbourne, a big American ship dropped anchor, and on board I went. I got hold of the captain, told him the news, and then boned him for papers. I informed him that I wanted them for countrymen of his, and he gave me all that he had, and here they are."

Smith pulled the precious documents from his knapsack, and in a few minutes we were absorbed in devouring the contents of letters, and Boston and New York newspapers.

We never knew the name of the captain who responded so promptly to Smith's appeal, but wherever his fortune may lead him, may he have fair winds, and high freights, and never lose a spar.

No one can understand the joy with which a letter is received from home, unless he has travelled in foreign lands, and been without advices from friends for many months. The letters were the first that we had received while in Australia, and we prized them more on that account, perhaps, than if we had been in constant communication with the States.

We had written from California, announcing our departure, and directing that all letters should be sent to Melbourne until further notice, and the warm expressions which our epistles contained showed that our friends had not forgotten us.

Smith, who seemed as fresh as the day that he started from Melbourne, left us to our letter-feast, and prepared supper with that dexterity which had distinguished him many times; and even when we had put our papers under lock and key — so greedy were we, and fearful that some acquaintance would step in, and desire to borrow a journal before we had gleaned the news — waved us back, and expressed himself competent to perform his allotted task without interference.

"You talk about home and the news until after supper, and leave me alone, 'cos after we light our pipes we shall have business matters to look over, and figure up, unless the woman and her husband gets along, and then we shall see fun."

"What woman do you mean?" I asked.

"Why, didn't I tell you that Barney was married?" demanded Smith.

"Of course you did, and said that he was about five miles from town, and would be here in two or three hours' time."

"Well, Barney has his wife with him, and a pretty life she is leading him. I listened to her scoldings and complaints until I couldn't stand any more, and then I whipped up my cattle and got out of the sound of her tongue, and by good management I have avoided her for two

days. She is good looking, but has got the spirit of the devil in her composition."

We recollected that Murden, in his letter, alluded to the lady, and although we were not impatient to see her, we knew that she would have some claims upon our hospitality for her husband's sake, and to prevent her from breaking out into open mutiny, we made some few preparations to receive the lady with becoming honors. We got out a small tent that we owned, and had made on the passage from San Francisco to Australia, and pitched it near the store for the express accommodation of the bride and groom, and then stocked it with a mattress and blankets, and thought the lady would be delighted at our delicate attentions. We even kept back supper an hour, and added a number of little luxuries, on purpose to give her an agreeable surprise, and show that we were still susceptible of woman's influence and beauty.

At about seven o'clock we heard the rumbling of wheels, and the loud, quick crack of a stockman's whip. Smith glanced anxiously towards the supper, and was visibly agitated, as though he expected to receive disastrous news. Rover, who had been lying near the door, waiting with remarkable patience for his supper, uttered a howl, and retreated towards the horses, as though to communicate some bad intelligence.

"Why don't you stop the team, if this is the place, you confounded fool?" we heard some one say.

"That's her," groaned Smith; "I should know that voice if I was off the Cape of Good Hope, and I almost wish that I was at sea, or on a desert island."

We hurried to the door, to receive our guest, and with our curiosity somewhat excited to see the woman whom all appeared to dread.

To our extreme surprise, we saw a female not more than twenty years of age, dressed in the latest style of Melbourne fashion, with a frank, pleasing face, looking fresh and clean, which was so extraordinary, in that part of the world, that we rather exceeded good manners by the length of our gaze.

We little knew, at the time, that the lady, for the purpose of making a favorable impression upon our susceptible hearts, had insisted upon her husband's stopping his team, a few miles from Ballarat, while she made her toilet, and to do so, had used all the water in the water kegs, to the great distress of the oxen, who were really suffering for a drink.

Yes, the bride was really handsome, and would be called so in any civilized portion of the world, where beauty is recognized by the standard of regular features, clear skin, white teeth, and a perfect form. Her eyes, too, were large, black, and lustrous, and she understood the use of them as well as the most arrant Spanish coquette that ever lived.

I advanced to the team, and extended my hand for the purpose of assisting the lady to alight, for her husband seemed occupied with his cattle, and unable to afford her those delicate attentions which a wife sometimes requires.

"Who, in the devil's name, are you?" she asked, in a quick, pert manner, as though determined to astonish us on the first hour of her arrival.

I heard a smothered laugh in the store, as though Smith was endeav-

oring to prevent an explosion, and even Fred had hard work to retain his countenance.

"This gentleman, Maria," cried the woman's husband, rushing to my rescue, "is one of my employers, whom I spoke to you about."

"O, is he?" she asked, with a strong stare, first at me and then at Fred. "Well, I don't see any thing remarkable about him, and he isn't half as good looking as the fellow standing in the door."

The compliment to Fred, at my expense, was answered by another suppressed groan from Smith, while the poor husband hardly knew whether to abuse his better half or coax her.

"Don't talk that way to strangers," the poor devil pleaded, but his good nature was all thrown away

"Go and attend to the cattle," she ordered, "and let me alone. I haven't had a moment's peace since I married you, and I almost wish that I had fallen to the stout miner who wanted me so much. He was something like a man, and was as big as two of you."

"I wish, with all my heart, you had," muttered the bridegroom, but he took good care not to let her hear him.

"Well, give me your hand," the wife exclaimed, addressing me; "I see that no one is coming to my assistance, and a poor beau is better than none, as we used to say in Radcliff Highway." And when I extended my hand, she grasped it warmly, pressed it strongly, and with a display of ankles that put my modesty to its severest test, gave a spring, and was on the ground beside me.

"Well, you ain't so bad looking as I thought for," Maria continued, flashing a wicked glance at me, with her large eyes, that stirred my blood, in defiance of her forwardness and vulgarity. "We shall be cronies, I know. Only let me have my own way, and make love to me, and we shall get along quite pleasantly."

"But you forget your husband," I insinuated, seeing that that worthy individual began to look rather black at the idea of having a rival in his wife's affections.

"O Lord! what's the use of mentioning Barney? He's a poor coot, and will soon get used to my ways; won't you, deary?"

The husband didn't make an audible reply, but I understood him to say "Damn," quite distinctly.

"What have you got for supper!" our female visitor asked. "I'm hungry enough to eat a two-year-old baby. Let me have something, that's a good feller, and then we'll talk about other matters."

I didn't admire her impudence, but as Fred was inclined to keep in the background, and Smith wouldn't respond, I had to do the honors of the house with as much dignity as possible. I seated her at our rough table, and helped her liberally, and was pleased to see that absence from her haunts in London had not diminished her appetite, or caused a regretful feeling in her heart.

"I'm glad I accepted the chance to visit this country," she said, "for I begin to like it. The old fogies promised that I should have a husband as soon as I arrived, and they kept their word, but I wished that I'd got a larger one. I don't like little men, and never did."

Her husband was heard to observe that he preferred a quiet woman to a noisy one, but the remark didn't seem to make much of an impression.

"By the way," Mrs. Barney cried, "where am I to sleep to-night? in that little room?"

Before we could answer her, she arose from the table and ran towards it, and saw our patient lying upon the bed.

"Hullo!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, "what is that old fellow doing there? I can't have him with me!"

I explained to her that a bed had been provided in a tent but a few feet from the store, where she and her husband could make themselves comfortable, if they were so disposed, but she would not listen to me.

"Do you s'pose," she cried, "that I'm such a fool as to sleep out under a tent, where I shall be liable to be eaten up by the savages? My old man can sleep there, but I'm going to pass the night in the store."

We assured her that we could not consent to any such arrangement. That all our papers and every thing that we possessed in the world was in the store, and that we could not think of leaving under any consideration whatever.

"Well, who wants you to leave?" she demanded, with a flash of her amorous eyes, that would have told powerfully on men of more nerve than ourselves; "there can be no harm if I stay here. You are men of honor, I suppose?"

Again did her large, black eyes fall upon me, but I was blind to her blandishments and arts; and, at length, Maria appeared to entertain the same opinion, for she threw out signals to Fred, and when she found that they were not answered, she commenced the practice of a thousand arts, which a woman knows so well how to use, to make him feel an interest in her welfare. But all her play was useless, and even when she pretended that her hair, long, black, and wavy, fell around her shoulders accidentally, and when she laughed, and threw it back from her fresh, child-like face, we were not melted, for we remembered that she had a husband, and that his rights were sacred.

Her bold challenge was unheeded, and Maria felt that she was defeated, even where she was sure of victory. She had, apparently, entertained a different idea respecting us, and for a few minutes she sat looking humbled, but not ashamed. It seemed a pity that one so fair should be so rude and vile; but the streets of London soon corrupt, and the haunt from whence Maria graduated is notorious for its wantons.

We pitied her husband, although we had only known and employed him for a short time, yet we had found him honest and industrious, and apparently disposed to do well. I could see that he felt grateful for the course which we had pursued, and I determined to have a long talk with him, upon the first favorable opportunity, in regard to his future prospects.

"Well," Maria muttered, after sitting in silence for a short time, suddenly starting up, "if I am to be turned out of doors, I suppose that I must go without delay. Come along, old man, if you are coming," she continued, addressing her husband, and the latter obediently followed to the tent, which we had been to some pains to prepare for her.

"Thank Heaven, she has gone," said Smith, fervently, raising his head, like a camel after a cloud of dust had passed over a desert; "only think what my wife would have said, if she had insisted upon sleeping

in the same room with us. And yet I feared that she would carry her point, for she is as determined a vixen as ever assumed the form of woman."

The matrimonial life of poor Barney was not a lengthy one; and I may as well follow it to a close, while I am writing upon the subject. At his request we paid him off, and hired another man to drive the second team. He had money enough to commence housekeeping, or rather tent-keeping, on a very respectable scale, and with the funds which he had left, purchased a mining claim, nearly worked out to be sure, but still, considerable sums of gold had been taken from it, and quite a number of nuggets of fair size had been secured.

The claim was very near our store, so that our advice was frequently required by poor Barney, who led rather a hard life of it, toiling as he did all day under ground, in wet and cold places, and when night arrived, half of the time he would have to get his own supper, his amiable wife being on visits of privacy to people in the neighborhood.

For the first few weeks of their residence at Ballarat the ill-matched couple did all of their trading at our store, until at length so many stimulating luxuries were purchased by Maria, that Barney requested us to refuse her credit, which, in compliance with his wishes, we did, and received such a torrent of abuse from the wife for so doing, that we wished her back to her old haunts, in Radcliff Highway, and had serious thoughts of attempting to recover damages from the "Moral Emigration Society" which exported her. For a woman with so fair a face, she had the vilest tongue that I ever heard.

After the credit system was abolished, Maria transferred her favors to a store on Gravel Pit Hill, where, for a time, she was quite a favorite, and thrived wonderfully; but her husband got wind of her doings, and threatened to shoot the first man that he saw taking improper liberties with his property, and that rather dashed the spirits of the gallants, for Barney was bold as a lion, and carried a pair of very good pistols in his belt, in addition to a bowie knife of wondrous keenness.

The poor, depraved woman, finding that she was watched, and that her male companions kept aloof, after the threat which Barney made, got up a clandestine correspondence with a young fellow who was smitten with her pretty face, and to put a stop to it Barney was obliged to break one of his rival's arms with a pistol bullet, one morning, just as he was putting a letter under a log that stood in front of his tent.

The wife, for the first few days, refused to be comforted, and then she apparently forgot the matter, and seemed to care no more about it. To her husband's surprise, she paid more attention to his comfort than usual—remained at her tent while he was absent, forsook the company of strange men entirely, no longer run in debt, and such a complete change was observed in her, that the Rev. Mr. Blackburn ventured to call once, and inquire if her sinful heart had melted. What answer Maria returned is unknown, as the reverend gentleman never divulged; but it was noticed that he left her tent walking quite rapidly, and that he never ventured there a second time.

I think that it was about six weeks after Barney had broken the gallant's arm, that he suddenly presented himself in the store, his face radiant with happiness.

"I've got some good news for you," he said, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"What is it, Barney?" I inquired; "have you found a nugget?"

"Better than that," he cried.

"Then you have found a chunk."

"No; something better than that — ten times better."

"Well, relate it. We are impatient to learn what good has befallen you."

"You would never guess," Barney said, in a mysterious manner, as though what he had to impart would bear keeping for some time; "but," and here his face once more beamed with smiles, "my wife has cut stick."

"What do you mean — run away?" I asked, surprised at the intelligence.

"That is what I mean. She has run off with the fellow whose arm I broke some time since; and she not only took her clothes, but she seized every thing of value I had in the tent. They have got six hours the start of me, but I think ——"

He paused, and seemed to consider for a moment.

"You think that you can overtake them," I suggested; "I have no doubt but that you can, and the best horse that we own is at your disposal."

"O, bless your heart, I was not considering the subject in that light," he answered, "I was thinking whether I should advertise that I would not be responsible for any debts that she contracts."

I told him that I thought he need give himself no uneasiness on that score; but Barney was a mathematical body, and always desired to do business on the square; and as he seemed so set upon writing an advertisement, I furnished him ink and paper, and after a laborious process, he wrote the following, which I copy *verbatim*.

"NOTICE. — My wife, Maria Barney, the ugliest woman that ever lived, has left my tent and board without any justifiable cause, 'cos I use to do all that I could do to make her pretty comfortable, and in spite of my wishes, she would cut up like the devil, and run after other men. Now, I want all men to notice this act of mine. I won't pay a d——d cent of her debts, and I hope no one will return her to me, 'cos I don't want her. JIM BARNEY."

I persuaded Barney that the announcement would be valid in law, if he only stuck it up in the store, where it could be read by the miners, and it may be there until this day, for all that I know.

CHAPTER LX.

Mike finds the Large "Nugget."

What trifles will sometimes change the destiny of a man!

Barney, after his wife had left him so unexpectedly, earnestly desired to give up mining and return to his first love,—the driving of cattle and teaming. We tried to persuade him to stick to his claim; but he was resolute, and declared that if we would not purchase his mine he would sell to the first adventurer who made an offer; and to prevent the man from sacrificing his property, we purchased on speculation, and paid him just the price he had given. Even after we came into possession, we did not know what to do with the mine, for we had no desire to work it ourselves; and, as a large portion of the allotted ground had been dug over, old miners were shy, and strangers did not bite readily at the temptations which we held out to them.

For a number of days the mine was neglected; and during that period it filled with water, and that was another good reason why it could not be sold; and jokes were cracked at our expense by friends, who lounged in the store purchasing trifling articles, in regard to our speculation, as they termed it. We took all in good part, until one day a man made an application to us for something to eat. We supplied his wants, and upon inquiry found that he was willing and anxious to go to work at a cheap rate. I proposed, partly in jest, and partly in earnest, that he should be employed baling out and cleaning out our mine. Fred assented, when we showed the man what we wanted done, and left him at work, not expecting that he would make much headway; but in this we were disappointed, for our employé made such diligent use of his time, that in the course of the afternoon the mine was free of water and dirt, and Mike announced that he could commence digging in the morning if he had a few "shores" and boards to prop up the places where excavations had been going on. These we readily granted, and began to take an interest in our claim that we had not felt before.

"Mike," I said, at supper time, addressing our new acquaintance, "we will give you one quarter of the gold which you find, and board you into the bargain, but we will not pay you wages."

Mike thought of the proposition for a moment, and announced his intention of accepting it without restriction, and at daylight the next morning he was at work many feet below the surface of the earth, picking away the dirt, and examining it carefully, as though he expected to find a nugget in every gravel stone that he met with. Once or twice in the course of the day, we walked over to the spot and lent a helping hand, for the purpose of freeing the place of water, and when night arrived, we had no need to ask questions in regard to the luck of Mike. His face proclaimed that he had found nothing; but I think that he was more disappointed on our account than on his own.

"No luck to-day, Mike?" said I.

"Divil a ha'penny of goold have I found sir; but there's no telling what may come on yet. I don't despair."

Neither did we; although we had but few hopes of ever getting our money back. The next morning Mike was promptly at his post, and we did not hear from him until about two o'clock; I was dozing on a lounge, Fred was asleep on the counter, and Mr. Critchet was mending stockings, — about the first work that he attempted to do, — when Mike rushed frantically into the store, threw himself upon his knees, and began talking, laughing, and crying at the same moment.

"Glory to God and all the saints!" he exclaimed, after he had recovered his breath, and then he began to laugh frantically, swaying his body back and forth, as though it was an impossibility to keep still.

"It's my opinion," said Fred, without rising from his recumbent position, "that you are a little out of your head, or else you have been drinking."

"Divil a bit of whiskey have I touched for two days; but I'll have a drop now for the purpose of drinking long lives to your honors. It's me head that is affected, and well it may be. O, it's little did I think that I should come to this. Glory to God — it's plazed the old woman and the childers will be."

He made a dive at the whiskey cask, and drank a pretty stiff nipper before he could compose himself. We did not interfere, because we did not know but that the fellow might have escaped from the mine while it was caving in, — accidents of that kind happening quite frequently, — and that fright had turned his brain.

"Now, Mike, be kind enough to tell us what has happened," I said, thinking that he had mystified us long enough.

"O, such news," he exclaimed, springing upon his feet, and executing a wild sort of shuffle that would have delighted the hearts of the 'finest pisantry' in the world, had they been present, to have seen his antics.

"Well, what is the news?" I demanded, while Fred, too indolent to speak, lay upon the counter, and laughed a sleepy sort of laugh, without changing his position.

"Murderation, who would have thought of it? It's a rich man ye will be, Mike, ye lucky divil. What will the old folks say, when they hear of it? Glory to St. Patrick, but won't the boys stare, and call me Mr. Mike!"

I began to have an inkling of the man's meaning. I sprang from my seat, caught Mike by his collar, and shook him for a few seconds, until I thought that his senses were returned before I put a question.

"Mike, you devil," I exclaimed, "you have found a nugget."

"Whoop!" he yelled, springing up, and striking his feet together with excess of joy, "I found the granddaddy of lumps."

"What's that?" cried Fred, starting from his recumbent position, and beginning to take an interest in the conversation.

"It's a lump as big as my head I've found," roared Mike, making another dive for the whiskey barrel, but we choked him off, and made him stick to his text.

"Do you mean that you have found a nugget of gold as large as your head?" demanded Fred, eagerly.

"To the divil wid yer nuggets — what do I know about nuggets? It's a lump of pure goold I've found; as big a lump as my head, and ten times as heavy."

We could hardly believe the news Mike imparted to us was true; but his eagerness convinced us that he had stumbled upon something, although we feared it was a lump of quartz, with a few streaks of gold running through it, such as was often found in Ballarat, and which, for the want of a good quartz-crushing machine, was thrown aside as being worthless.

"Come and see for yourselves," yelled Mike, almost out of patience at our obstinacy in not placing implicit reliance upon his word in regard to the matter.

"Will ye come and look at the beautiful piece of goold wid me? and thin perhaps ye'll belave without further words. But remember — one quarter is mine."

We told Mike that we would stick to our word, and that he should have his share even if he had found a lump as large as his body. The assertion satisfied him, that we intended to deal honestly by him; and leaving Mr. Critchet to tend the store, we walked towards our claim, the purchase of which, on our part, had excited the ridicule of more than one of our friends.

On our way, Mike related the manner in which he found his treasure. He said that he had worked steadily for an hour or two, and had not found the first sign of gold, and that he stopped for a while to rest and smoke his pipe, and also to trim his lamp; that he fell asleep, and slept for an hour or two, and dreamed that he was sitting on a nugget of gold that was as large as his father's mud cabin in Ireland, and that he was wondering how he could get it up the shaft, when he was awakened by a drop of water which trickled from the ground overhead, striking him on his nose.

He started up, and thought how pleasant it would be if his dream would only come true; and rather by accident than design he let the point of his pick fall into the earth where he had been sitting. The dirt gave way, and he thought by the dim light of his lamp, that he saw something glisten.

Once more he struck the ground, threw aside a little dirt, and then he imagined that his dream had come true, for the bright gleam of gold was before him.

"Me heart was in me mouth," Mike continued, "and I did not pretend to use me spade or me pick for fear that the goold would vanish from me sight. I threw myself upon me knees, and dug with me fingers, and hardly dared to breathe for fear that I should lose it; and when I had freed it from the dirt, and attempted to lift it up, O! didn't it seem good to have it howld back, as though it didn't like being dragged from its bed so early in the morning!

"I worked it clear of the soil, and then me heart was too full to stay there any longer. I had to run to the store and ease me heart. But mind, honeys! Fair play in the division, ye know. Mind the honor of an Irish gentleman, who is too modest to spake for himself."

Mike's idea of modesty was about on a par with the natives of Australia, who think they are in full dress when the only article of wearing apparel that they can boast of is a hat, or a cast-off stocking, thrown on the roadside by some blister-footed adventurer on his way to the mines.

We pacified the man a second time; and by this period we were at

the shaft, and ready to descend. Fred insisted upon going first, and after him the Irishman, while I hailed a passing patrolman, and got him to extend the same favor to myself, when I got ready to be lowered in the bucket.

"Well, Fred," I shouted, "have we been hoaxed or not? Is it a blarney stone or a lump of gold that Mike has found?"

"Pull up," yelled Fred, and I heard some heavy substance thrown into the bucket.

"I'll see you hanged first," I retorted. "You are not going to make me draw up a fifty pound piece of quartz, and then laugh at me for my labor."

"Pull up quick," cried Fred, in an eager voice; and I heard a howl from the Irishman at my obstinacy.

"In the name of the saints, up wid it, good master Jim," pleaded Mike; but I rather hesitated, strengthened in the view which I took in the matter by the policeman.

"It's little gold that was ever taken from this claim, sir," he said, "although it has paid one or two proprietors by speculation. The soil is not of the right kind for large nuggets."

"How big is it?" I asked, addressing those who were some thirty feet below me.

"About as large as your head," was Fred's reply.

"Is it solid?" I demanded.

"It looks to be! But don't stand there asking questions, when you can satisfy yourself. Round up the bucket."

I began to think that the Irishman's dream was true, and that the whiskey had not taken possession of his senses.

Fred was not in the habit of indulging in practical jokes; and I finally concluded that I might as well satisfy myself whether a stone or a lump of gold was in the bucket. I wound up the windlass, while the policeman peeked down the long, dark shaft, eagerly watching for the bucket, to see what it contained.

"Do you see any thing?" I asked, when I thought that it was near enough to get a glimpse of its contents.

Before I could repeat the question, the eyes of the patrolman glared as though starting from their sockets, and his face flushed scarlet.

"Up with it, in the name of goodness," my companion shouted, leaning over the shaft, and grasping the rope that held the bucket in one hand, and attempting to pull it up, regardless of the rough windlass that I was working at.

"Can you see it?" I demanded, resting from my labor for a moment, and glancing down the shaft.

"Don't stop, sir," cried the policeman; "up with it, or the devil may carry it off before our eyes."

I did not feel so superstitious; and in spite of the warning managed to get a glimpse of the lump that had almost turned the brains of the Irishman and Fred.

At the first glance, I almost let go my hold of the windlass, I was so overpowered. My eyes appeared to blur over, and my brain grew dizzy. I did not seem to possess the strength of an infant, and for a moment I paused, and tried to rally my senses.

My heart beat so wildly that I thought it would burst, for the single glance that I had cast towards the bucket revealed to me a sight that would have driven half the miners of Ballarat crazy, and the remaining portion frantic with delight, provided, of course, they had seen and owned what I saw.

CHAPTER LXI.

The Result of growing rich too rapidly.

My officious friend lifted the nugget from the bucket and laid it before me, and for a few minutes I gloated over and passed my hand over its unequal surface, and weighed it in my imagination until I was roused from my reverie by those in the shaft.

"Send down the bucket, so that we can get up," shouted Fred; "we don't want to stop here all night!"

I hurried to relieve my friend, and by the time that he was safe out of the shaft, and the bucket had re-descended for Mike, I was comparatively calm.

Fred and myself shook hands over our prize, and then lifted it, and sought to form some idea of its weight, in which we were aided by the official of the law.

"It will weigh forty pounds," cried Fred, after a moment's handling.

"More than that, sirs," answered the policeman, with a dogmatical air that was charming to us, because every additional ounce made us richer.

"I've seen a few nuggets since I've been stationed here, and I had oughter know about such things," he continued, turning our prize over and over, and scrutinizing it with the air of a connoisseur. "Do you see, there's not an ounce of quartz stuck to the whole piece, and gold is awful heavy when it comes in the lump style."

We assented to his remarks without a word of opposition. We could have listened to him for hours, it seemed so good to have him extol, instead of depreciate, the nugget.

"How much, then, do you think that it will weigh?" I demanded.

"Well," replied the officer, after a moment's pause, and another lifting operation, "I should say about fifty pounds, if my opinion was asked.

"If my advice was asked," the officer continued, in a patronizing manner, "I should say, take that nugget to the government reception office without delay, and after it is weighed, get a certificate of deposit. That is my advice, but my opinion may not be worth much, one way or the other."

We agreed that his advice was good, and that it would be wisdom on our part to accept of it without delay, for it was rather dangerous having so much gold in a store, when the town was swarming with thieves.

There was one person, however, who did not seem to like the propo-

sition, and that was Mike. He had a faint suspicion that the project was intended to defraud him of his rightful claim to one quarter of the nugget, and his face showed the feelings of his heart, while we were talking of the matter.

"Is it moving ye intend to do?" he demanded, eyeing the gold as though it had been guilty of a treacherous act.

"We are going to remove it to the government office for safety," I replied.

"For safety?" repeated Mike. "Where could it be more safe than under me eye, or under me head while I slept. Ough! don't bother, but let me carry it to the store, where we can cut it up, and I can get me quarter."

"You wouldn't spoil such a nugget as that by cutting it up, would you?" cried the policeman; "it is the finest specimen of gold that I ever saw, and should be preserved."

"Faith, if that is the case," muttered Mike, "it might just as well have remained in the pit, for I don't see what good it will do us."

We succeeded in explaining to the capricious gentleman what we intended to do, and pacified him by promising that he should have his share in ready money before night, if he desired it; and I will do Mike the justice of saying that he did, most emphatically, and other men would have acted in the same way.

By the time that we had concluded to deposit our treasure at the government office, considerable of a crowd had collected in the vicinity of our claim, and was admiring the nugget, and wishing, with all their hearts, that it belonged to them, and that they could be so fortunate. We even began to receive proposals for our claim, and prices were offered that we never dreamed of asking.

"Now is the time to sell," whispered our tempter, in the shape of the policeman.

"Don't dispose of the mine for any consideration," cried Mike; "I'm sartin that I know where another nugget is hid, and I'll have him out, by the blessing of St. Patrick."

"Sell while the excitement lasts," continued the tempter; "I never knew of two nuggets being found close together."

"It's our fortunes we'll make out of the mine," Mike exclaimed. "I'll go back to Ireland, buy land, and be called 'the squire,' and drink buttermilk twice a day, and ate parties every meal. I'll have a still of me own, and make the real poteen whiskey, and drink punch, instead of water, and smoke 'bacca, instead of cabbage leaves. Won't I keep open house, and none shall be more welcome than an Australian miner!"

"Will you have a pig?" asked some one in the crowd.

"A pig!" repeated Mike, with intense scorn; "I'll have a dozen of them, and each one shall be fatter than ye."

A roar of laughter followed Mike's sally, and the questioner, who thought that he could ridicule the honest Hibernian, instantly subsided, and was seen no more.

We intended to send to the store for the purpose of getting a stout bucket, into which we could put our nugget and carry it to the office; but Mike would not listen to the suggestion for a moment. He shouldered the precious lump of gold, and marched through the streets, as

proud of his charge as though the whole of it belonged to him, and he knew where he could get another just like it.

A crowd of miners followed at our heels, and such a mixture of tongues was never heard, except at the construction of the tower of Babel.

Followed by this motley crew, we passed along the streets, amidst shouts and congratulations, until we gained the government reception office.

"There," cried Mike, throwing down his load upon the counter of the office, much to the astonishment of the clerks; "plase weigh that, and see how much it comes to, for I want me quarterings."

The clerks did not comprehend his words, although they did understand the meaning of his action; and while a couple of police officers, who were stationed at the building, drove from the room all those not interested in the matter, we watched the large scales that were to tell us to a farthing how much the nugget was worth.

"Well," cried Mike, "can't ye spake, and let us know how much me quarterings come to?"

The clerk, who was figuring, looked at the speaker with silent contempt, and did not even condescend to reply, much less hasten his movements.

"Your nugget," said the clerk, at length, addressing Fred and myself, "weighs just fifty-one pounds two ounces, and if there is no quartz in the interior of the lump — and I think that there is not — at the present price of gold it is worth, in round numbers, about two thousand five hundred pounds sterling. A pretty good day's work, sirs."

"Say it again," cried Mike, all ready for another Irish break-down.

The clerk repeated the amount with much amiability. He had just learned that Mike had an interest in the nugget, and his respect for the man increased in proportion to his wealth.

"Two thousand five hundred pounds sterling," repeated Mike, in amazement. "Who would have thought that there was so much money in the world? I'll ate nothing but paraties, and drink nothing stronger than buttermilk and whiskey hereafter. Two thousand pounds and five hundred of 'em to make the figures look a little odd. Ough! murder, won't the old woman and the childers be plased to see me riding home in an illegant coach and four, dressed like a lord!"

The subject was one of so much importance that Mike, in defiance of the dignified-looking clerk, indulged in a hornpipe, and was only brought to his senses when told that he would be locked up by the policemen as a lunatic, unless he was more quiet.

"I'll be like a lamb," he replied; and then, after a moment's quiet, he leaned over and whispered to the clerk, in a confidential manner, —

"If the nugget is worth two thousand five hundred pounds sterling, pray, what is me quarterings worth? Answer me that, if ye can."

We did not give the clerk time to make the calculation, but offered Mike, on a venture, a sum equivalent to two thousand seven hundred dollars for his quarterings, while we concluded to run the risk of the interior of the nugget being filled with quartz. Mike accepted the proposition without delay, and merely taking a certificate of deposit, we returned to the store, counted out in sovereigns the amount that was

due Mike, made him put his cross, in the presence of Mr. Critchet, to a paper certifying that he had been paid in full, and with the gold in his pocket, off he started for his nearest countrymen, for the purpose of treating every Irishman that he met, and getting rid of his sudden wealth as soon as possible.

I urged him for half an hour to let the larger portion of his funds remain in our hands, but he was obstinate, and feared trickery. I then endeavored to persuade him to deposit all but a hundred sovereigns in the government office, but strange to say, he was more fearful of the government concern than he was of our firm. At length I got out of all patience, for I saw that, instead of devoting his fortune to his relatives, he was determined to have a spree, and I let him go without another word of remonstrance.

He conducted himself precisely as I anticipated. For one week two thirds of his countrymen suspended work, and drank cheap whiskey at Mike's expense. His gold vanished like snow on the top of Mount Alexander at midday, and although many of the better class of Irish visited our store every day, and begged that we would interfere and help save a portion of his wealth, we declined to do so; and even Mr. Brown, who was appealed to, shrugged his shoulders, and made an oft-quoted remark that "a fool and his money were soon parted." The most that we would do was to promise that Mike should not buy a single sixpence worth of liquor at our store, and we kept our word, for which we got most heartily abused by our late employee's friends; and one day we were obliged to have two or three arrested, owing to a display of pugilism which they made.

All things must have an ending, and to follow out Mike's fortunes, I may as well state that he soon lost all of his money, was deserted by those who called themselves his friends, and that he was left without the means of buying a loaf of bread, or a glass of whiskey to keep off the *delirium tremens*. He applied to us for employment, and we gave him something to do; but the thoughts of his folly weighed heavily on his mind, and one morning we found Mike hanging by his neck, in the rear of the store where we stabled our horses.

Had he but adhered to his first resolve, of returning to Ireland, and living in peace for the remainder of his days, his gold would have been of some use, not only to him, but to the community; but as matters transpired, the finding of the nugget was his greatest misfortune.

But to return to the day when our wealth was increased by a lucky stroke of the pickaxe, and when we began to think seriously of mining claims as means of making fortunes. In this connection we were advised by Mr. Critchet, who, although not of a sanguine temperament, had made considerable money in speculation as well as in digging, and was enthusiastic when he learned that we had been amply repaid for all funds which we had advanced.

"Now is the time to sell," he said, when he heard half a dozen applicants make inquiries regarding the terms for our now famous claim. "Don't hold back, and say that you don't believe that the mine contains another nugget. That won't do in Ballarat. Speak up with confidence, and tell about the richness of the mine, and your disinclination to sell. That will only make people more eager, and you will get better terms."

"But we don't believe that the claim will ever pay another dollar," I replied.

"What is that to you?" he retorted. "Didn't you buy without expectations, and haven't you ever purchased a lottery ticket and drawn a blank? A claim is a lottery, and one of the most treacherous kind. Sell while you can, and try another site."

We remembered of a purchase that we had made in California, when a shrewd fellow sold us his worked-out claim for two hundred dollars, and we were laughed at for our greenness. We felt a desire to retaliate, but we had been taught in New England schools that two wrongs did not make one right, and we banished the plan from our minds of urging people to buy our mine on the plea that it was rich beyond comparison. If it was desired, we determined that it should be bought without extolling claptrap of any kind.

While we were in this frame of mind, a stranger entered our store, and expressed a desire to see the nugget which had turned half the heads in Ballarat.

He manifested no disappointment when told that it was at the government office, and after asking a few questions, boldly made an offer for our claim that was greatly in advance of what we had anticipated.

There was a moment's hesitation on our part, and we were strongly tempted to close the bargain; but better thoughts came to our aid, and we declined the offer, on the ground that he offered more money than the mine was really worth, and more than he could possibly get back.

"That," replied the would-be purchaser, "is my lookout. I know the condition of the mine, and what has been taken from it. If my offer is accepted I am willing to pay the price that I mention, and whether it repays me or not is none of your affair."

It would have been cruel to disappoint the man, and as money was our object, and he was so anxious to do us a service, we, with great magnanimity, accepted of one thousand dollars in gold dust, and gave the purchaser a deed of the claim.

"A good day's work!" cried Fred, rubbing his hands, as soon as the stranger's back was turned. "A dozen or twenty more such, and then, hey for home!"

We had made, as Fred said, a good day's work for the firm, for, of course, Smith's interest was equal to our own, and he shared in any speculation that we might enter into; but while I am on the subject, I may as well tell of a money-making operation that entirely eclipsed the above transaction, even including the finding of the nugget.

I was in Melbourne, one time, having run down from the mines for the purpose of buying a few articles which we wanted forwarded by express, and while I was dodging from one store to another, I saw that the stock of flour was rather low, and that, unless fresh arrivals soon augmented the small quantity on hand, the price must go up. I made a few cautious inquiries, and found that the dealers at Sydney were not much better off than those at Melbourne, and it occurred to me that soon a speculation movement would begin, and that we might as well have a hand in it as to let others make all the money.

As I said before, I made careful inquiries, and discovered that two ships were daily expected, one from Chili, and the other from New

York, and both were loaded with flour. No vessel was expected from England with grain on board, although it was not known for certainty.

Upon this intelligence I pondered for an hour or two, and then resolved to try my luck in the way of speculation. Flour was selling at fair prices, I think, although, owing to the non-publication of a price current, and to the absence of an exchange, no two merchants sold alike.

After I had made up my mind what I intended to do, I went to the bank where we had five thousand pounds lying to our credit, drew out the money, and then began my purchases. In each case I stipulated that the flour should remain in store one week, until I could get teams to cart it to Ballarat. To this a ready assent was given, and the merchants expressed themselves pleased to transact business with me. In some instances I paid cash, especially where the quantity bought was very slight, not amounting to more than fifty barrels, or one hundred sacks; but where I bought two or even three hundred barrels, I claimed the privilege of one month's credit, after paying twenty per cent. of the amount down.

In two hours I had engaged nearly every barrel and sack of flour in Melbourne, and then, and not till then, did I begin to tremble for the result of my speculation. A dozen times during the night did I wander through the streets of the city, and down to the water's edge, for the purpose of seeing how the wind blew, and each time did I find that it was favorable for vessels entering the harbor. I consulted an aged mariner, with tar plentifully sprinkled upon the seat of his trousers, and the son of Neptune told me, with many grave shakes of his head, that, —

"You can't always tell about these things; sometimes the wind blows one way here in this bloody hole, and sometimes it blows different on the ocean."

The next day I despatched two large teams to Ballarat loaded heavily with flour, and sent a letter by the mail, telling Fred what I had done, and advising him to put the price up, but to first frighten the merchants by bantering them with offers for their stock. I knew that that course would startle them into asking at least one third more than they had been demanding, and that a dozen of the most prominent ones would start for Melbourne without a moment's delay for the purpose of seeing what the movement meant.

CHAPTER LXII.

The Flour Speculation. — Mr. Critchet's Story.

After I had written to Fred, and started the teams, I felt a little easier, although no change had taken place in the market. I knew that dealers had sent to Sydney for a supply of flour, and I feared that their orders would be filled, but in this I was agreeably mistaken. Flour at

Sydney was ten shillings per barrel higher than at Melbourne, with an upward tendency; while not a sack could be obtained of the few farmers who raised wheat, short of eighty pounds per ton,—just double what I had paid.

Two days after my bargain, and still no ships were signalized. I felt a little more confidence in myself, and in the bold scheme that I was attempting to carry out. A dozen teams were in the city, for the purpose of carrying provisions to Ballarat and other mines, but they were delayed, owing to their inability to get flour. I heard the price of the article quoted at fifty pounds per ton, and I debated whether I should hold on longer, or sell.

Twice, during the day, a rumor was started that a large American ship was signalized, and that she was loaded to her scuppers with grain; but I quickly proved the falsity of the report, and then made my appearance in the store of the largest grain dealers in Melbourne, Messrs. Hennetit & Co., since failed, and didn't pay their English creditors but sixpence on the pound, and I strongly suspect that American firms suffered worse, even, than that.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Hennetit, coming forward and shaking my hand with great cordiality, "I have so desired to see you!"

"May I ask on what account?" I replied, with the utmost *sang froid*, although I was almost bursting with anxiety.

"Why, to tell you the truth—and I am almost ashamed to confess it—we sold you more flour than we intended, having several orders to fill, and I thought that if it made no difference to you, we would borrow one hundred barrels, and repay you in the course of a day or two at farthest. It is not of much importance, but I concluded that I would speak to you in regard to the subject."

Even while conversing, he led me to his neat and commodious private room, as though the sight of his wealth would soften my heart, and awe me to subjection to his will.

"You see, my dear sir, it is such a trifling matter, that I am almost ashamed to make the request. I am positively mortified to think that we made such a mistake as to dispose of our whole stock. However, a ship will be here in a few days, and then we can supply the country at greatly reduced rates."

I did not interrupt him, but sat patiently, while he was endeavoring to wheedle me out of my speculation. He displayed the anxiety that he felt, to carry his point, while speaking, and I knew that one of his restless eyes was on me, to read my thoughts, during the interview.

"I am sorry that I cannot accommodate you in this instance," I answered, "because I bought for the Ballarat market, and the people of that section of the country are in want. Flour at the mines is selling for sixty pounds per ton, a large advance upon what I paid."

"O, I don't mind allowing you a small margin for your trouble. You paid forty pounds per ton. I will give you forty-five for a hundred barrels."

"My dear Mr. Hennetit, it really grieves me to think that I must refuse your offer," I replied, "but I couldn't think of selling below the market rates. If you wish a hundred barrels at fifty-five pounds per ton, I shall be exceedingly happy to accommodate you."

"Pooh, pooh!" he muttered; "I can't consider such a thing. If you think to speculate in flour in this country, you will miss it, and lose your money."

"Perhaps I shall; but as flour has risen in price since I purchased, I don't see why I should not reap the benefit of it."

I bowed courteously to the merchant, replaced my veil, (for during the summer months, when the ground is dry, and the wind blows strong, it is necessary to wear a veil, to protect the eyes from the dust which rises in heavy clouds, and at times obscures the sun like a thunder squall,) and walked off, hoping that I should hear his voice calling me back, but in this I was disappointed. Mr. Hennetit thought that I would repent, and come to his terms, and so determined to stand the pressure one day more, at all hazards.

I walked directly to the river, and found that the wind was blowing off shore like great guns. This elated me, although I remembered the words of the tarry mariner, and wondered how it was out upon the broad ocean.

For two days I had not slept an hour's time, or eaten more than a crust of bread; but when I saw how the wind was blowing, I returned to my hotel, and supplied my nearly exhausted system with food.

No sooner had I finished dinner than I was told that a gentleman wished to speak to me in the bar room. I went there, and saw one of the merchants from whom I had purchased one hundred sacks of Chilian flour, and one hundred barrels of American brand.

"Well!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with some warmth, "you have *dished* us, and no mistake! Who, in the devil's name, would have supposed that those two ships could have made such long passages — did you?" and then, without waiting for me to answer, he marched up to the bar and called for drinks, and I must confess that I gratified him, and pleased myself, in taking a very good glass of wine and water at his expense.

"Come, now to business," my acquaintance said, wiping his lips on a richly embroidered handkerchief, imported from Manilla.

"Very well, to business it is," said I.

"You have got all the flour in the market in your hands," he began.

"I know it," I answered.

"Yes, I suppose that you do," he said, dryly; "now, I want the flour that I sold you, and which still remains in my store. What is the figure, sir?"

Here was a man that I could trade with, and not resort to art. He was never schooled in diplomacy, and his blunt nature rejected all subterfuge. I saw that he was willing to allow me to make all that I could, knowing that he would have done the same, had he been situated as I was.

"Fifty-five pounds per ton," I answered.

"I'll take it at that figure," he replied, promptly; "come with me to the store, and I will settle the amount immediately."

I did not require to be invited a second time; and after I had received my money, I calculated how many more tons I should have to dispose of before I could call my funds whole.

In the midst of my calculation, I was disturbed by a message from

Messrs. Hennetit & Co. They desired to see me immediately, and requested to know when it would suit my convenience to call on them. I replied, in half an hour; and when I was leaving the store to keep my appointment, my blunt friend stopped me.

"Hennetit & Co.," he said, "have received a number of orders for flour, and they must fill them. Don't sell for less than what I paid you; perhaps you can get more."

I thanked my acquaintance for his hint, and acted on it. When Mr. Hennetit talked about purchasing a few barrels, I put him off by replying that it was hardly worth while to retail them, and that I had received proposals for all that I held, and that I probably should accept.

This information rather startled the cautious gentleman, and the question was put to me without equivocation, —

"How much advance did I demand for the flour which they held for me?"

"Fifty-six pounds per ton," I replied, promptly and firmly.

"Would I not take fifty pounds?"

"No."

"Would I sell all that I held in the city to the firm of Hennetit & Co. for that price?"

I replied that I would, provided the transaction was cashed that afternoon.

There was a short discussion among the members of the firm; and I saw the junior partner go out in great haste. He returned in a few minutes, and reported, I knew what he went after. He desired to learn the direction of the wind before completing the bargain. Fortune favored me. It was blowing a gale directly off shore.

"Will you take a check on the bank, or do you desire gold dust?" was Mr. Hennetit's polite interrogatior

I replied that I preferred the dust, if it was clean, and had been received from the government office. It was warranted free of sand; and while the weighing commenced, I drew up orders for the delivery of flour held by the several firms in the city. By the time that I had concluded, the dust was put into bags, marked with my name, the amount in each bag, and I found myself the possessor of ten thousand pounds in hard cash, or nearly fifty thousand dollars.

In less than an hour the money was safely locked up in the vaults of the bank; and then I began to feel as though I had passed through an ordeal that had left me, at least, ten years older than I really was; and I almost made a solemn vow never to attempt another speculation; but I am glad that I hesitated, because before I left Australia I indulged in many; and while some were unfortunate, others, I am happy to state, turned out well, and enable me to live at the present time, a life of such comparative idleness, that I almost repent being a bachelor, and sometimes think that the sea of matrimony would relieve my life of *ennui*.

I owe an apology to the reader, perhaps, for thus taking so much space to relate a transaction that made some noise in Melbourne, owing to the boldness of my strike, and the success that attended it. It was a lottery, with the chances in my favor, and had I not improved it there were others who would.

The vessels expected did not arrive for three days after I sold out; yet the Messrs. Hennetits & Co. made money out of the operation, and whenever I met them, after our business relations were ended, always joked me about selling to them for so low a price, while they were prepared to give me at least five pounds more per ton.

But I will retrace my steps, and return to our store at Ballarat, from which place I took flight on the very day that we found our nugget.

"I think," said Mr. Critchet, as we sat smoking our pipes after tea, the store being closed for the night, "that I shall be well enough in a few days to go to work myself. I feel the spirit in me, but the flesh is yet weak."

"You will not be fit for a day's work in the mines for a month yet," returned Fred.

"I can't remain idle for that length of time," Mr. Critchet said; "I have already trespassed on your hospitality, and am laboring under a debt for kind attention, that I shall have hard work to repay. I am not rich, but if the few thousand pounds which I have accumulated, and which are on deposit at the government office, can recompense you, they are yours."

"I suppose," said Fred, re-filling his pipe, lighting it, and then puffing away vigorously, "that you imagine that it is best to surrender all your property in the most gracious manner possible. If that is your opinion, you misjudge us."

"My dear young friend!" cried Mr. Critchet, "I certainly did not entertain any such opinion. I have been treated as kindly and carefully as though you were my own sons; and through your exertions and attentions my life has been saved. I feel as though I cannot repay you with empty thanks, for I have caused an expenditure of much time and money. Let me feel as though I had endeavored to requite your kindness."

"So you can," returned Fred, composedly.

Mr. Critchet brightened up. I looked at my friend anxiously, and feared that he had forgotten our agreement on the subject under discussion.

"The fact is," said Fred, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "if you wish to deserve our friendship, never speak again in reference to the subject of a recompense."

"But——" exclaimed the old man.

"No buts about it. You sought our house as a refuge for safety, and if you found it, none can be more satisfied than ourselves. The first night I saw your gray hairs I thought of my dead father, and I determined to do all that I could for the honor of his name. God bless his memory — he was a good man, and I am certain that if his spirit is allowed to visit this earth, it would approve of my conduct."

"Then all recompense is refused?" demanded our guest, after a moment's silence.

"Decidedly so."

"Then let me make a proposition to this effect: My claim is lying idle, and is probably half full of water. I feel that I am not strong enough to work it, and will tend the store until well, and one or both of you can take my mine and carry it on, and, if you choose, divide the

profits between us three. By such a process you will be spared from being under pecuniary obligations to me, and I shall feel as though I was in some measure, however slight, repaying the expense of my board and lodging."

How carefully the old gentleman concealed the fact, that the mine which he owned, and had partially worked, was one of the most valuable in Ballarat. and that if we consented to the arrangement we should, in all probability, make two or three thousand pounds with but a trifling amount of labor!

"If you will do as I wish," Mr. Critchet continued, "I shall feel as though I was not intruding upon your privacy, or upon your generosity. If my offer is not accepted, then to-morrow I return to my tent, and trouble you no more."

"But consider," I said, "you have no knowledge of storekeeping, and will make but a poor clerk for attending upon these rough miners."

"My dear boy," our guest exclaimed, "before you were born, as a British merchant, I sold thousands of pounds' worth of West India goods; and should now, if I had my rights, be in possession of a princely fortune. Do not think that I am speaking boastingly, for I am humble. All pride, excepting the love of honesty, and a desire to see my family once more in comfortable circumstances, has left me; and now I labor for love of my children, at whatever business I can make the most money."

"You have a family, then?" I asked.

The old gentleman nodded; and through the tobacco smoke I saw that his eyes grew moist at the question. We sat silent for a few minutes, for we did not wish to interrogate him in relation to his family affairs, although I must confess that I felt something of a Yankee's curiosity in regard to his position in life.

"I have no desire to keep from you my story," Mr. Critchet said, "although it may not interest you, and is but a repetition of trust and wrong — of confidence and betrayal. Such as it is, however, I will confide to you, and hope that it may prevent you from being shipwrecked on the same sea."

The old gentleman moistened. his lips with a drink of cold tea, and began: —

"My father was a merchant before me, and dealt largely in West India and India goods; and, when I was of sufficient age, I occupied a stool in his counting room, and learned the mysteries of buying low and selling high, for the purpose of taking his place when he felt rich enough to retire.

"When he did, which was at a ripe old age, I was left in possession of two thirds of his property, it being shared by my sister and myself; and when my sister married, which she did without my consent, and almost before I knew her husband by reputation, I paid over to her every penny that belonged to her, and wished her God speed on her journey through life. We were nearly strangers to each other, owing to the death of our mother during her infancy, when an aunt had volunteered to assume the control of her education, and that was one reason why, perhaps, my advice was not listened to in regard to the choice of a husband.

"Well, time passed on, and at length I too married, and was blessed with a daughter, and then I renewed my exertions for wealth for my child's sake; for then I was a silly and ambitious man, and hoped that I could connect myself by marriage with some peer or lord, or even a baronet. That was eighteen years ago, my friends, and since that period I have grown wiser, and, as you see, older. If I can live to see my daughter wedded to an honest man my ambition will be satisfied."

I began to reflect and ponder over those words. How did I know but that I might suit her fancy! I looked at Fred, and would have sworn that he was debating the same subject. I already began to feel jealous; for an English girl, at the age of nineteen, is not to be passed by without a kind consideration. I wondered if she was handsome, but supposed that she must be, judging from the appearance of her father.

"I rarely saw my sister," Mr. Critchet continued, "after her marriage, but I heard from her frequently; and seldom looked at the Morning Post without seeing her name announced as having been present at a party the night before. I did not envy her her life of dissipation, for I preferred to secure happiness in a different course; but still I could not help wondering how her husband managed to support such extravagance. Too soon did I learn the secret; for one day he sought me out, and with a gloomy brow, announced that his purpose in visiting me was to obtain money to meet notes which were maturing.

"I did not feel surprised, and neither did I question him in regard to his circumstances. I listened patiently to his expressions of regard, gave him a check on my bankers for two thousand pounds, and after he left my counting room I busied myself with my accounts, and tried to forget an unpleasant impression that his interview had left upon my mind. A few days after I received a note from my brother-in-law, Mr. Follet——"

"Follet?" I cried, in surprise; "then the young man who is still held by the commissioner is his son, and your nephew?"

Mr. Critchet gave a token of assent, and continued:—

"In which he requested a further loan to meet some pressing engagements. I complied with the demand, although I felt that I was wronging myself to do so. A few weeks passed, and I was unmolested; but one morning I received a hurriedly written letter from my brother, and I saw with grief that it was dated Fleet Street Prison, and that he had been arrested the night before for debt, and now called on me in piteous expressions to save his name from disgrace. I went to see him, and found that his wife was unacquainted with his situation, and that she was making preparations to have a grand party that night, at which she expected half the notables of London. He pleaded long and earnestly, and at length I paid the claim that was brought against him, although it took many thousand pounds to do so.

"Three days afterwards I was visited by my sister, in company with her boy, a young man with dark eyes and a sinister expression of countenance, that too nearly resembled his father's to be pleasing to me; although God knows I have tried to love the boy, and should have ultimately succeeded had he not behaved like a barbarian.

"My sister requested a private interview, which I readily granted; and then with tears, and groans, and lamentations, told me that her

husband's fate rested in my hands, and that if I wished to kill her I could by pursuing a harsh course. I begged her to explain, but she threw herself upon her knees and vowed that she would never rise until I had promised to do as she wished. I declined to make a profession that I did not understand, and at length I drew from her that her husband, the man whom she had married in opposition to my wishes, had forged my name to bills amounting to nearly fifty thousand pounds, and that I was expected to save him from a public death, or transportation for life, to conceal the crime. I indignantly refused, but I did not know how hard a woman can plead. I was promised my sister's property that was settled on her at the death of my father, and she gave me an order to sell out her stock in the public funds, for the purpose of reimbursing me, although I found that I should suffer to the extent of twenty-five thousand pounds by the transaction; but sooner than witness her tears I consented, and, in consequence, was made almost a beggar."

The old man brushed away a tear that coursed down his rugged cheeks, and for a few minutes seemed lost in thought. At length he continued: —

"I assumed the forged notes and paid them as they matured, but the public discovered that I had made many sacrifices in my business to meet the spurious paper, and then came doubts and suspicions, and at last a run upon my house, and to save myself I called upon my sister for her fortune. God of heaven! how I felt when I discovered that the villain, her husband, had already used her name, drawn her money from the funds, and had left for some part of the world where we could not trace him.

"I sank beneath the blow, and when I rallied my business was swept away, and the firm of Critchet was known only by its debts. I struggled for a time against the stream, but I could not gain a foothold, and at last yielded and gave up all thoughts of resuming business. My family was supported by a small settlement of one hundred pounds which had been left to my wife by an aunt, and by music lessons which my daughter was enabled to give, and thus we struggled along, until at length my sister, who could not bear up under her disgrace, died and left me her child to provide for. Well, I undertook the task, and when I had failed to resuscitate my fortunes in England, I left for Australia and brought him with me."

"And you have never heard of his father since?" I asked.

"No."

"Hullo, house — grocers — let me in!" shouted a voice at the door, and a heavy kick was bestowed on the wall to attract our attention.

Mr. Critchet started from his seat, and then sank back to the floor with a groan.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

"ARE you sick?" we demanded, springing towards the prostrate man and helping him to a chair.

"I know not," he replied, wildly; "but unless I am dreaming, I heard a voice demanding admittance to the store. Do not open the door, for mercy's sake. I cannot bear to look upon his face again."

"Poor man," muttered Fred; "his story has affected him to such a degree that his mind wanders. Let us put him to bed as soon as possible, for fear of a return of the fever."

"You are mistaken, young men, if you think that fever or a diseased imagination has caused my emotion. See, I am perfectly calm."

In fact, he didn't seem as though afflicted with his late sickness, for his flesh was cool, and his face pale, but for all that he trembled violently, and as though attacked with the ague.

"I thought that I recognized the voice," our patient said, in a half whisper, and in a listening attitude, "but I may have been mistaken."

"Hullo, within there — open the door, and sell me a quart of the best quality," cried the rough voice on the outside, accompanied by another violent shake of the door that made every thing jar again.

Rover uttered a threatening howl, and pawed at the door as though desirous of inserting his teeth into the body of the brawler.

"I was certain that I could not be mistaken," exclaimed Mr. Critchet, in a hoarse whisper.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Will you let me have the liquor? Say yes or no," cried the impatient fellow on the outside, with an oath.

"I am positive that that is the voice of my brother-in-law," Mr. Critchet said. "I have not heard him speak before for six years, yet there are some things that I cannot forget. What shall I do? How shall I act?"

"Do you wish to speak to him?" I asked; "if so, we will admit him, and trust to our arms for security. Not a hair of your head shall be injured, even though you tell him disagreeable truths."

"What say you? Are you awake? Shall I have the rum?" continued our midnight visitor.

I waited for the old gentleman to come to some conclusion, and although he was intensely agitated at the thought of an interview, he gave a token of assent.

"Call off the dog and let him come in," said Fred, "and do you keep in the background for the present," addressing our guest.

I quieted Rover with a word, and then unbolted and unbarred the door and threw it open, feeling some curiosity to see the man who had had the audacity to commit extensive forgeries, and yet escape the punishment of the law, especially when the criminal code of England is so rigid that rank or station in life is not respected.

"Well, sleepy heads, have you woke up?" was the impudent question that first greeted me, and through the door strode a tall, powerful-built man, with dark whiskers which covered his face almost to his eyelids, and long, black hair plentifully sprinkled with gray. He wore a short monkey-jacket, such as sailors are in the habit of adopting as a convenient overcoat for working aloft on shipboard — a blue flannel shirt, with large collar turned over and confined to his neck with a black silk handkerchief — a pair of fancy colored pants, somewhat soiled and worn, yet a little better than the majority of the miners were accustomed to wear at Ballarat — and lastly, the visitor had on his head a felt hat of ample proportions, such as the stockmen and shepherds of Australia have adopted to protect their heads from the noonday heat, and eyes from the bright sun, while scouring the plains in search of cattle.

"You are late in your purchases," I remarked, in a conciliatory tone, as the stranger entered.

"A man with money, and a desire to spend it, can choose his own time to trade, I suppose, can't he?" the black visitor asked, in a gruff manner; and as he moved his arm to emphasize his words, I saw the butts of two pistols protruding from his coat pockets — a discovery that did not alarm me, although I was glad that their possession was revealed.

"That depends upon two things," I replied. "First, whether ——"

"Pshaw! don't bother me with your homilies," he exclaimed, impatiently, as I closed the door and turned the key.

"No, I won't, for you are homely enough in all conscience," I answered, pretending to think that he referred to personal beauty.

The stranger turned on me like lightning, and his sinister eyes were expressive of intense rage, but I pretended not to notice his actions. Rover, however, became slightly alarmed for my welfare, and placed himself between us, and showed his strong teeth with perfect frankness.

"Call off your dog," our visitor said, finding that it was useless to intimidate, "or I will make short work of him, and sell him to the Chinamen as a luxury."

"You would never have another chance to trade with the Celestials," I answered, carelessly.

"Why?" demanded the black ruffian, with a grim smile, as he walked towards that portion of the store where Fred was sitting, Mr. Critchet having entered his room.

"Because, if you harmed my dog, I should take the liberty of shooting you without a moment's delay."

"Well, that is a question that two would have to study over," the stranger answered, in a more subdued tone, and with less inclination to swagger. "I suppose that you little think that I carry these things about me, and that they sometimes bark when I say the word, and more to the purpose than any dog you ever owned." And he tapped the butts of his pistols with a confident air, but the announcement was not such as he had anticipated.

"We sometimes do a little in that line ourselves," I answered, "and we take care that the tools we use shall be the best that money can obtain. When this speaks it means something."

I quietly drew from my coat pocket a revolver, and held it before him, and then as quietly returned it to its resting-place.

"I'm satisfied with your word," the dark-haired stranger said, a grim smile spreading over his face. "When gentlemen meet they should know how to treat each other with courtesy. By your weapon I judge that you are an American."

"My friend and myself both claim that country as the land of our births," I replied, pointing to Fred, who sat smoking his pipe for the purpose of keeping the insects, attracted by our light, at a distance.

"O, I didn't see that you had a companion," the stranger exclaimed, spying Fred for the first time, which somehow rather disconcerted him; but he quickly rallied, and continued to converse in a free and easy manner, like a man who had seen much of the world, and had opportunities of enjoying it.

"I am glad to know that you are Americans, for I have visited that country, and was kindly treated by those with whom I came in contact. A great and fast country, as I can bear witness, for while travelling in the southern part I suffered a railroad collision and a steamboat explosion on the same day, and yet escaped with whole bones. Were I not an Englishman I would be an American, to use the words of Alexander, altered to suit the occasion."

"May I ask if you belong here in Ballarat?" I demanded, with the intention of finding out what his business and prospects were.

"To tell you the truth, I am here on what your countrymen call a 'bender;' a freak that assails me about once in three months, and after it is over I return to my stock-house and think how great a man can be, and yet how little."

"Then you are a stockman?" I said.

"That is not what I am termed," he cried, with an expression of pride upon his dark face. "I employ stockmen to look after my cattle, but I am called a proprietor."

"I always supposed that proprietors preferred to live in the large cities, and trust their flocks and herds to employees," Fred said, dryly.

"What is it to you what I prefer?" he demanded, turning on Fred fiercely. "Have I not a right to do as I please as long as I am my own master, and pay those who work for me?"

"No one denies it, I believe," exclaimed Fred. "I only made a supposition. Some men dislike to be seen in cities, while others would go mad if obliged to live on the plains. I sometimes think that it depends entirely upon the conscience which every man is supposed to have locked within his breast, although my arguments are liable to be refuted, on the ground that there are some men destitute of such an article."

"Death and the devil! do you refer to me, you babbler?" shouted the stranger, his hands again seeking the pockets where his pistols were nestling.

"Don't get enraged at a few words," I said, half soothingly and half ironically. "My friend didn't mean to cut you with his remarks."

"We won't quarrel over an unmeaning word," he said. "Give me a quart of good whiskey, and I will go back to the tent where I have agreed to stop for the balance of the night. I was told that I could get the best liquor here of any place in Ballarat."

"Raising cattle is considered a profitable business in Australia," I hinted, while pretending to be attending upon his wants.

"I find it satisfactory," he returned, shortly, as though determined to baffle my inquiries.

"I have some thoughts of engaging in the business," I continued, "and would, if I could buy a tract of land on the banks of the Loddon or the Campaspe. All the pasturing that is desirable within sight of Mount Macedon skirt is already sold, I suppose."

"I should think it was," he answered, with a grin; "but I am open for an offer."

"How! do you wish to sell?" I asked, apparently in surprise.

"If I can get my price, yes."

"How long have you occupied your tract?" I inquired.

"For four years, and during that time my flocks have increased threefold, and now I count my sheep by thousands and cattle by hundreds."

"And your range is located on the banks of the Loddon?" I asked. "How much land have you taken up?"

"Five thousand acres of as good pasturage as can be found in the country, well watered, and free of bogs and quicksands."

"Why do you desire to sell, if the raising of cattle is so productive?" I demanded.

"None of your business. If you wish to buy, say so, and I'm open for a trade. Come and see me some day, and I'll talk with you on the matter; at the present time I'm in a hurry."

"I think that I know a man who will take the station off your hands without delay. Wait a moment and I'll bring him to you."

I left the cattle raiser wondering at the suddenness of my exit, and entered the small room, where I found Mr. Critchet suffering with nervous agitation.

"Have you heard all?" I asked.

"Yes, all."

"And do you think that you recognize the voice?"

"It is Follet," he whispered.

"Dare you face him, and demand restitution for your wrongs?" I inquired.

"Why should I fear to meet him, and strike terror into his guilty heart? Let me go at once."

"Then roll the collar of your coat over your face, and slouch your hat over your eyes, and keep them there until I ask you to remove them. Now keep up a stout heart, and trust to fortune for the result."

Mr. Critchet followed me from the room without another word. His agitation seemed to have left him, and he displayed all the "pluck" which characterizes the representatives of Great Britain, when placed in situations that require nerve and courage.

"Hullo! is that the man you have selected to purchase my stock?" cried the stranger, with a hoarse laugh; "why, a horseback ride of ten miles before breakfast would finish him for the day, and if bullocks should get sight of his thin form, they would break into open rebellion, for they know that it requires a powerful arm to use a stock-whip. Take your old granddaddy back to bed, and send me a customer that

can keep the saddle all day, and sleep in a pond of water all night, if need be."

"He is not so feeble as he looks," I replied, giving Fred a quiet signal, which he understood, and therefore rose and sauntered near the counter, so that he could be in the rear of the stockman, in case he was disposed to use violence.

"See," I continued, removing the hat of Mr. Critchet, and throwing back his collar, "he does not look so very weak, after all."

I noticed the stranger gave a convulsive start when he saw that pale face, so full of mild reproach; I heard him utter an exclamation which sounded like an oath, and then he turned and rushed frantically towards the door; but before he reached it, he was attacked by an enemy in his rear that he little counted on.

Rover, who had been lying quietly at our feet, watching the movements of the stranger with distrust, yet apparently determined to give the man a fair hearing before he made up his mind in regard to his character, uttered a yell when he saw our visitor turn to fly, and before he reached the door the faithful dog had seized a portion of his garments on that section of his body where the strain is supposed to be the strongest, and, with defiant growls, held him fast.

"Call off your dog," shouted Follet, with an oath, "or I'll send a ball through his lean carcass."

"If you but offer to lay your hand upon a pistol you are a dead man!" exclaimed Fred; "remain quiet, and you are safe."

"Why should I obey you?" demanded Follet, with a sudden jerk of his body, for the purpose of freeing himself from the jaws of the dog, in which he was unsuccessful, for Rover took a double grip, and I think that his teeth grazed the forger's flesh, for he attempted to apply his hands to the spot, but was not able, and therefore they once more sought the formidable pistols which his pockets contained.

"Curse you and your dog! Do you think I'm a bullock, to be thus dragged down, and make no resistance?"

He was in the act of cocking the pistol when a slight blow upon his arm, near the elbow, with the butt of a stock-whip, made him drop it as suddenly as though his limb had been paralyzed from wrist to shoulder.

"Do you mean to rob or to assassinate me?" cried Follet, rubbing his arm, and looking dangerous.

"Neither," we replied; "but we require you to be patient, and to make atonement for some of the wrong that you have done. This you shall do, or be lodged in a prison and returned to England."

"Do you take me for a child, that I should be thus lectured by boys and a gray-headed idiot? You don't know me yet!"

The desperate man suddenly turned, while talking, and with one of his heavy boots kicked the hound upon his head; but the noble brute did not even utter a whimper, although the blow brought blood upon his glossy coat. But dearly did the fellow pay for his cruelty, for, as he dashed towards the door, for the purpose of escaping, Rover sprang upon him, seized him by his neck, and bore him headlong to the floor, where he held him, despite of his struggles and cries.

We let them fight it out without interference, but a few minutes were

sufficient to produce cries for quarter from Follet, although before we listened to them we disarmed him of his knife and remaining pistol.

"Get up," I said, addressing the prostrate man, "and remember that acts of cruelty sometimes bring immediate punishment."

He arose, sullen and angry, yet not daring to manifest it by deeds and words. I motioned him to a place near the stove, where Mr. Critchet was seated, and from whence he had witnessed all that had transpired, without remark or interference.

"Why am I treated in this manner?" demanded Follet, hesitating, before he complied with my request.

"Because we think that it is necessary for you to make reparation for wrongs that you have committed during a lifetime."

"Who accuses me?" he asked, after a pause.

"I do!" said Mr. Critchet.

"I never saw you before in the whole course of my existence!" cried the forger, with a degree of effrontery that was characteristic of the man.

"Do you deny that you married my sister, and that I lent you money, besides taking up your forged paper to save your neck from the common hangman?" demanded Critchet, earnestly.

"I do," replied the prisoner, without a moment's hesitancy; "and I will also add, that if you think that I am to be robbed with impunity, you are mistaken. What money I have about me I shall hold on to; and when I do gain my liberty look to yourselves, for there is law to be obtained in Ballarat."

We consulted apart with Mr. Critchet, and found that he was positive that the man who had wronged him so basely was in our power, and we had too great confidence in the judgment of the old gentleman to believe that he would tell a lie, or endeavor to deceive us in the premises.

"How old was young Follet when his father left London?" Fred asked of Mr. Critchet.

"About sixteen," was the answer.

"Then we can settle this matter in the morning, without trouble, or further debate."

"How?"

"By confronting the son with the father."

We determined to try the experiment at all hazards, and as there was no law by which we could be reached for detaining a supposed criminal without a warrant, I suggested that a pair of irons should be slipped upon his wrists, for the purpose of insuring his security during the night, and that in the morning we should consult with Mr. Brown, and be governed by his advice.

My proposition was accepted, and the matter was communicated to Follet, who swore many strange oaths, and would have resisted, but he found that it was useless; and to add to his terror, Rover sat within a few feet of him, displaying his ivories, and ready to avenge his affront upon the first symptom of hostility.

The stranger at length complied with our terms, and while we provided a bed for him, we did not fail to intimate that Rover was to watch by his side, and give an alarm, in case he meant mischief during the night, of which we were not much afraid.

At daybreak we were all astir, and ready for business. We provided a substantial breakfast for our prisoner, and then I sought the presence of the inspector, and laid the whole matter before him.

He agreed with me that it was only right and just that Follet should make reparation for the wrongs that he had inflicted, but thought that it was hardly fair to make the son betray the father.

After studying over the matter some time, the inspector visited the prison, and got the young man to give a description of his parent, and so perfect was the likeness that there could be no doubt of his identity.

Then, for the first time, did we tell the forger that he had a son near him, who was held to answer for an attempt at murder. The feelings of the man were obliged to yield before the intelligence, but how much more intense was his sorrow, when told that his son had nearly murdered the very man who had stepped forward to save him from starvation!

"He came honestly by the disposition, so don't blame your son," said Brown, bluntly. "Consider how much injury you have caused the old gentleman, and ask your heart if there is not an opportunity to make some redress!"

"What would you have me do?" demanded the forger, sullenly.

"You own a well-stocked tract of land; you must give him a deed of it, and then leave this part of the country forever," Mr. Brown said.

"But then I shall have to begin the world without a penny, and I am growing old," pleaded the forger.

"So did your victim; and yet his age is greater than yours. When stripping him of wealth you had no misgivings, and as you showed no mercy, neither shall we."

"Give me time to consult with my friends," pleaded Follet; but Mr. Brown was deaf to his entreaties.

"Either go with me before the commissioner, and give a title to your property, or else you go to prison and wait the return of a ship to England, where you will be tried for forgery, and probably condemned. You can take your choice — a life at the hulks, or freedom and poverty."

"This is a d——d trap!" yelled the forger, "but I will not be caught so easily."

"As you please," returned Mr. Brown, carelessly; "I have a greater desire to see justice executed on men of your stamp than to attempt to compromise matters. Come with me."

He passed his arm through Follet's, and beckoned Mike to do likewise; but before the trio had taken three steps towards the door the forger's heart began to soften.

"Am I to be locked up?" he demanded.

"Ay, in the darkest cell in the prison," returned Mr. Brown, firmly.

"One moment!" he exclaimed; "will you agree to let me go free if I comply with your request?"

We gave the required pledge, and in less than three hours' time we had the satisfaction of placing in Mr. Critchet's hands a deed of all the property owned by Follet; and although the amount was not near the sum that the former had expended to save the latter's neck, yet it was sufficient to place the old gentleman in affluent circumstances for the remainder of his life.

CHAPTER LXIV.

Mr. Brown's Discharge from the Police Force.—Bill Swinton's Confession.

Mr. Brown, who had interested himself so successfully in Mr. Critchet's affairs, to be sure that Follet did not return to his stock-house, sent two men, old and experienced shepherds, to take charge of the stock and exercise a general supervision over the property until Mr. Critchet was disposed to sell it for the most that he could get, and he did not have to wait long for an offer; for one day the old gentleman astonished us by imparting the information that he had got a letter from a person in Melbourne who was anxious to buy, and desired an interview immediately. Our friend left the same day in the stage line, but before he went he made us a present of his claim, and a munificent gift it was.

We saw the old gentleman no more in Australia, but when in London, on our way home, via the overland route from China and the Indies, we had the satisfaction of once more shaking his hand, and fighting our battles over. His daughter was as handsome as she was accomplished, and her gratitude towards us for the kindness which we had shown her parent would undoubtedly have caused her to look with some degree of favor upon our suits, had we been disposed to demand the sacrifice. Fred was too modest, and I lacked confidence, and between us both we left London without daring to propose for the lady's hand. She is still unmarried, and her father writes me that she shows no disposition for matrimony. If I was not fearful of meeting with a rebuff, there would be one bachelor less in the world, or, as the stage heroes say, I would "perish in the attempt."

"I am tired of this," the inspector said, one day, entering the store, and throwing his weary form upon a mattress. "For nearly a week I have hardly had an opportunity to close my eyes, and my men are in the same exhausted condition as myself. I have warded off the blows as long as possible. But now I see no way of escaping a collision."

"What do you intend to do?" Fred asked.

"Resign my position, and let the commissioner take the responsibility. I have written thrice, asking to be exchanged, but at head-quarters they appear to be deaf to my prayers. You may think that it is cowardly to thus attempt to escape my share of the work, but you have been in too many exciting frays not to know me better, and to feel that where a blow is to be struck in a good cause I am never backward."

We assured the inspector that we never entertained a doubt of his courage, and that whatever course he decided on would meet with our approval.

"I cannot stay here and order men to fire upon miners whom I have known for many months, and whom I entertain a sincere regard for. Besides," and here the inspector lowered his voice and whispered confidentially, "the miners are in the right, and I don't blame them for

standing out against a tax that is levied upon all without regard to the amount of gold obtained."

"Had you not better remain as long as possible, and perhaps delay will enable the government to see the suicidal course that they are attempting. If you leave, and Mr. Sherwin is allowed full sway, I will not answer for peace twenty-four hours," Fred said.

"I have already made more sacrifices to my sense of dignity and manhood in the vain attempt to keep Mr. Sherwin within bounds and moderation than the country will ever give me credit for; and yet I am blamed, and accused of not doing my duty, because I do not fill the prison, and load with chains every person who utters a word against the government. If I had a sensible man to deal with instead of the commissioner, I think that this storm would blow over, or at least be delayed for some months, until advices could be received from the Home Secretary. But as it is——"

Mr. Brown stopped talking suddenly; and when I looked up to learn the cause, I saw, to my surprise, that Mr. Sherwin had entered the store unperceived, and had probably heard a portion of the conversation.

There was an embarrassing silence for a few moments; although Mr. Brown did not look at all frightened by the presence of his superior officer. I expected a scene, and I was not disappointed, for ill feeling had long been engendered between them, partly owing to the mining tax, which Mr. Sherwin was supposed to have induced government to believe was just and equitable, and partly owing to conciliatory measures instead of harsh ones, which Mr. Brown had judged best to adopt for the purpose of keeping Ballarat quiet.

"I need not suggest," said Mr. Sherwin, with one of his most sarcastic smiles, "that this store is hardly the place to squander time in when so many disloyal men are plotting against the government, and when an outbreak is threatened every hour."

"You are, undoubtedly, addressing your conversation to me," Mr. Brown exclaimed, with a lazy yawn, and a good-natured smile.

"I certainly am," was the short rejoinder, accompanied by a look of surprise.

"And I suppose that you think I am not doing my duty, simply because I am resting my weary form?" Mr. Brown asked, still maintaining his composure.

"Your thoughts are perhaps right on that point. Time is all that we desire now until the troops arrive, when we can deal with these foolish men as we please, and as the best interests of the country demand."

"I don't think that I distinctly understand you," the inspector remarked. "Do you wish me to break up the meetings which the miners are holding, and make arrests for every dissatisfied word that is uttered?"

"Such a course would meet my approbation, and, I think, the approval of the governor and his advisers. You may take a different view of the matter."

"And if I should venture to differ with you, what then?" demanded Mr. Brown, his cheeks flushing slightly.

"A resignation placed in my hands would be instantly forwarded to the proper quarter, and I have no doubt that it would be accepted," was the curt rejoinder.

"I feel quite grateful to you for the hint, and to show that I can act on it, will lose no time in drawing up such a paper."

Mr. Brown walked quietly to our desk, helped himself to a sheet of paper, wrote a few lines, signed his name with a flourish, and handed the document to the commissioner. The latter cast his eyes over it, and a grim smile mantled his dark face as he did so.

"You have done well, sir, and I think that the government will be obliged to me for thus bringing matters to a crisis; you are no longer a member of the police force at Ballarat."

Mr. Sherwin turned to depart, but Mr. Brown, still calm and quiet, detained him.

"One word before you go. You acknowledge that I am no longer your subordinate officer, do you not?"

The commissioner bowed stiffly, but did not deign to make reply.

"A few minutes since," Mr. Brown went on to say, "I was accused of squandering time. I wish to ask whether I was ever known to squander money belonging to the government?"

Had Mr. Brown fired a pistol at the head of the commissioner, the latter could not have been more astonished. He stared upon his questioner with a bewildered air; and I could see his swarthy cheeks turn pale, as though impeachment stared him in the face for malfeasance while in office. I knew that there were dark hints of his corruption, and that he had, in some manner not known to the public, made a fortune while he held the office of commissioner.

"What do you mean?" demanded Sherwin at length; and even while he spoke his voice was husky and tremulous.

"I asked a simple question, and it requires some time and consideration on your part to make an answer, it appears. I will repeat the question. Did you ever know me to squander money belonging to the government, and fail to give an account of it?"

"Do you dare insinuate aught against me in my official capacity?" cried the commissioner, stepping towards his late officer with a threatening brow.

"Have I said a word that should cause you to feel aggrieved? Do my words apply to you in any way or form?" Mr. Brown exclaimed, without flinching from the withering look that was cast upon him.

"I know what you mean; and if you dare to accuse me of peculation while in office, I will brand you as a liar!"

The belligerents were not more than five feet apart; and I expected to see some brisk work for a few minutes, but Fred passed between them, and prevented a collision that seemed inevitable.

"You have met in the store," said Fred, "on what we call neutral ground, and therefore we cannot permit this quarrel to go any farther. If you have, unfortunately, differences which must be settled, do not involve us, for remember, we are friends to both."

"You speak wisely," Mr. Sherwin said, after a moment's thought, during which time he recovered his composure; "I was foolish to get angry at any words that might be addressed to me by that gentleman.

I have known him long, and suffered severely from his vindictive temper. His claws are now cut, and he is powerless."

"But I have a tongue, and know how to use it like an Englishman!" cried Mr. Brown, proudly; "you may triumph now, but I warn you that before many days, you will be stripped of your title and honors, and inquiries instituted which will bring to light many secrets that you little dream of. I have watched your course in Ballarat, and the report I shall have to make is not a creditable one, believe me."

"I cannot prevent people from playing the spy upon my actions, and neither do I wish to. I am honest in my deeds, and care not who knows them; and if I am to be injured, it must be by some person who is ready to perjure his soul for the sake of revenge."

I thought that Mr. Brown would rush upon his opponent, and strike him to the floor, he looked so indignant. His small form swelled with ill-concealed rage at the accusation; but before an outbreak took place, I placed my hand upon his shoulder, and led him into the private room, and during his absence, Mr. Sherwin hurried off.

"The mean, cowardly wretch!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, grinding his teeth with suppressed rage; "to think that the very man whose peculations and stealings I have helped to cover up, for fear that disgrace should be brought upon the police department, now dares to place me upon a level with a spy, and to proclaim that the government will feel rejoiced at my loss, is sufficient to test the fortitude of a Christian. D—— him,—I would shoot him, if that would not deprive me of the satisfaction of seeing him disgraced."

We did not interrupt his ravings, and at length he cooled down, and smiled at his past folly.

"I am glad that I am now out of the force," he continued, "because, as I have always contended, there will be no honor gained when blows are struck, and much condemnation will follow. Government will shuffle the blame upon some poor devil of an employé, and contend that instructions were exceeded. Many letters will be written on the subject, and a rigid investigation held—pounds of printers' ink will be shed, and the newspapers will be lively with discussions, and in the end the miners will triumph, and the tax will be abolished."

"And what do you intend doing? stay here in Ballarat, or go to Melbourne?" demanded Fred.

"I have hardly made up my mind. I shall write to the captain of police a true statement of my situation, and the manner in which I was endeavoring to conduct affairs to avoid an eruption; and although I am not very desirous of the office, yet I will lay a wager that I am reinstated in some other locality, and that I take a higher rank in my profession."

The prognostication was correct; for Mr. Brown was removed from the Ballarat district, and did duty for many months in Melbourne as a lieutenant, and ranked next after Murden.

Just then a few customers entered the store, and we hastened to attend upon them, and after their wants were supplied, and the place cleared of eavesdroppers, Mr. Brown drew his chair up to ours, and asked,—

"Which of you would like to accompany me on a short journey, and be absent for a week or two, eh?"

"We have not time to spare for that," I said.

"But one of you can go as well as not; that fellow, Barney, whom I see hanging around here, waiting for Smith, can be made to assist the one who remains in the store."

"Where do you propose going?"

"I will tell you," replied Mr. Brown, hitching his chair still nearer, and dropping his voice to a whisper; "I am going to make search for a buried treasure!"

We started, and pricked up our ears. Here was something worth listening to.

"Do you think that one of you can go?" Mr. Brown continued, with a sly wink.

"Well, you have altered our minds slightly, already; but to have our free consent, state the case frankly."

"I will. You remember when we made an excursion into the country some three months since, that we had a brush with a party of bushrangers, and that we captured a number, and among them Bill Swinton, the leader?"

We nodded. We began to comprehend him. Mr. Brown continued, after first glancing around the room to see that no one was listening save ourselves,—

"You will also recollect, if you tax your mind, that I endeavored to get Bill to make some revelations concerning a quantity of dust which he helped rob a guard of many months since."

We remembered the circumstance, and also the furious manner in which Bill had refused to divulge his knowledge of the transaction.

"I told him then that I should learn in what part of the country he had buried his share of the treasure, but if I am not mistaken, I was laughed at and defied."

We confirmed Mr. Brown's words in that respect.

"Well," continued the ex-officer, "poor Bill has taken leave of this world, and I hope has gone to a better one. He was hardly suited for this bustling sphere, and I think his cares were too much for him."

"When did he die?" I inquired.

"Last night."

"Did he make a confession? who was with him when he died?" we asked, eagerly.

"Softly; you would hardly have required me to bother the poor fellow with questions, when his breath was scant, and his thoughts were on things not of this earth. I was with him, but he spoke not, excepting to utter the words, —

"'I am going — remember the *shadow!*'"

"To what did he refer?"

"That is precisely what the watcher, who was with Bill when he breathed his last, wanted to know."

"He was probably wandering in his mind, and knew not what he said."

"I think that he was sensible of what was going on around him, and uttered the expression to convince me of his sincerity."

"Make us your confidant, and we will endeavor to think as you do."

"I will, because in the first place I owe my life to your devotion on

that day, and therefore you shall share in all the benefits that are likely to arise from Bill's death; and in the second place it is necessary for me to have a companion to prosecute my searches for the treasure."

"Then the bushranger revealed the secret?" we eagerly asked.

"Listen, and you shall judge. When we had Bill in custody that day, I thought from his boastful style of talking, that he had money buried somewhere, and I determined to obtain it if possible, for I reasoned that gold would do me much more good than the cold earth.

"With this idea I visited Bill frequently while in prison, and each time gave him some little luxury, that the rules of the institution prevented his getting, unless money was plenty, and the fellow was destitute. I put off his trial on one pretext and another, and always gave orders in his hearing, that he should be treated kindly, and have as much freedom as the place afforded.

"At first my interviews with him were like attempting to tame an enraged bull, and all my advances were rejected. Other men might have got disgusted, but not so with me. I persevered, and gradually softened his rugged nature, but it was like water wearing away stone. At length I perceived that confinement was telling on the prisoner, and then I hinted how much better it would be for my welfare if I was rich and independent of the police force; and although at first my insinuations were rejected with scorn, yet time and an even temper effected my purpose; and one day after Bill had had a bad attack of fainting fits and convulsions, he told me his whole history, and ended with a confession that the dust which he had stolen, was buried, with other treasure, near the banks of the Lodden, within sight of Mount Tarrengower. That there was only one way to reach it, for quicksands surrounded the spot where the money was hid, and that I could find it by searching precisely at the hour of twelve o'clock in the evening, when the moon was full, for then Mount Tarrengower threw a shadow upon the edge of the spot, and no mistake could occur. In fact, he gave me such explicit directions, that I do not fear failure."

CHAPTER LXV.

The Expedition after Bill Swinton's Buried Treasures.

"And you think that Bill was not deceiving you?" Fred asked, after a moment's consideration.

"If you could have seen his death bed — how pleasantly and cheerfully he left this world for the next, and how comfortable he was with new pipes and an unlimited supply of tobacco, and two hard candles, got at my own expense, you would not have thought that the fellow was endeavoring to deceive me. Besides, he died so much like a Christian, forgiving every one, and entertaining no malice, that I can hardly believe he would have been guilty of such rascally hypocrisy."

"How do you know that Bill did not impart his secret to others?" I asked.

"Simply because I gave orders that no conversation was to be held with him; and to see that my orders were carried out, I sat up with him on the night that he died. Almost with his last breath he told me to 'remember the shadow.' I feel so confident that he told me the true spot where the money is buried, that I would not take one thousand pounds for my share."

We thought the matter over, and considered the subject in all its bearings. If Bill had spoken the truth, there was a chance for us to increase our funds with but little labor, and none in Ballarat would be the wiser for it. If the information was false, the only thing lost would be a week or two's absence from business, which, in the present exciting times, we hardly dared to spare. After a long talk, however, and upon Mr. Brown's assertion that there was no danger of an outbreak, for at least two weeks, I concluded that I would leave Fred in charge of the store, and undertake the expedition, in company with the ex-inspector.

Barney, who was with us, waiting impatiently for the arrival of Smith, readily consented to assist Fred to the extent of his ability during my absence; and without further ceremony we bound the agreement with Mr. Brown, that we would share equal with him, in whatever expenses were incurred, or whatever was found.

"We must start to-morrow morning," Mr. Brown said, after all the preliminary arrangements were concluded, "because the moon fulls the day after to-morrow, and we shall want to be on the spot to make an examination by daylight. How soon can we be ready?"

"To-morrow, as early as you desire," I replied.

"Good; we shall then lose no time. It will be necessary for us to go well armed and well mounted, you know, for the distance is long, and the road dangerous. Besides, we shall require a pack mule or horse to carry a few tools, and provisions enough to last us for a week."

That part of the business was quickly arranged. Mr. Brown owned a large gray horse which he had always rode while at Ballarat, and we had three good animals standing idle. I proposed to borrow a pack saddle, and make the poorest animal do packing service, while I mounted the other. The idea was adopted, and before night we had our provisions all prepared, our blankets ready for strapping, and a pickaxe and shovel selected, in case we should have to stir the earth with an extensive search for the hidden treasure.

In the course of the day, the ex-inspector, after bidding his associates farewell, and telling them that he intended to visit Melbourne on business connected with his resignation, moved all his traps to the store for safe keeping during his absence, and when evening drew on, we lighted our pipes, and in subdued tones spoke of the prospect of finding enough gold to pay us for our journey.

The next morning we were up before daylight, preparing breakfast and attending to the horses, and before the sun was ready to show his face, we were in the saddle, and on our way to the banks of the Lodden, driving the pack horse before us at an easy canter, and enjoying all the beauties of the morning.

We avoided the road which led to Melbourne, and upon which some forty or fifty poor devils were working out their mining tax, and by a cut across the country, in the direction of Mount Tarrengower, were enabled to save some few miles of travel, as well as to avoid answering questions from those whom we met on the road. The latter is no slight labor, as every person on a journey to the mines is desirous of asking the latest news, and whether the gold is as abundant as ever.

By ten o'clock we found that our animals began to suffer from the heat, and as our appetites were pretty well sharpened, we called a halt beneath the shadow of some gum trees, relieved our horses of their saddles, and wet their mouths with water, and after a hearty lunch, leaned back and smoked our pipes with delicious contentment, and without a thought of danger.

We were soon unconscious of every thing around us, and did not awake until past four o'clock, when we once more resumed our journey, and by sundown we had gained a small brook within a few miles of Mount Alexander. Here we proposed to pass the night, and after watering the animals, and stalling them in a good piece of fresh grass, we began to make provision for rest. We had no desire to kindle a fire, for the country in which we were travelling was not entirely safe, and a light would have only attracted attention, which we were desirous of avoiding.

"For once," said Mr. Brown, as he arranged his saddle for a pillow, "I feel as though I should rather regret meeting with bushrangers, for I have every thing to lose, and no honor to gain by a contest. If, therefore, the gentlemen of the bush will only avoid us, I shall feel thankful."

"Do you know this part of the country to be frequented by bushrangers?" I asked, examining my revolver for the first time since we had left Ballarat.

"I don't vouch for their presence, but here is water, and there is food," Mr. Brown said, pointing away to our right; "the scamps are always sure to be located where these two essentials are to be found, and, as a general thing, they show good taste in the selection of their retreats, and when idle, feed upon the choicest parts of sheep or lamb."

"Is there a sheep station near?" I asked, not being aware of it before.

"Within two miles of us, I should judge. It was formerly called Hawswood, in honor of the proprietor; but after the gold fever broke out, he sold it to a man whose name was Buckerly, a fine-looking fellow, and bold as a lion. I made his acquaintance when he first landed at Melbourne, accompanied by a wife and children, and advised him to trade at the mines and acquire a fortune; but he was a large-feeling person, and had occupied a good position in England, and I suppose that he considered all kinds of trafficking plebeian, and beneath his dignity.

"Buckerly thought of entering a banking house in the city, but unluckily altered his mind and concluded to raise stock. He met with Hawswood, got an exalted idea of the profits, and without asking advice, paid five thousand pounds for the place and all that was on it. I had serious doubts of the success of his project, especially when he told me that he should move his family to the stock-house immediately, and su-

perintend his estate. The poor fellow thought that it was fitted and furnished like a suburban villa, and his wife, one of the prettiest and most affable women that ever landed in Australia, looked forward, with many expressions of pleasure, to the delightful country residence that she was to occupy with her husband and children."

Mr. Brown stopped, and appeared to be in a reflective mood, while I, who had been dozing, waked up, and requested him to finish.

"I never saw them afterwards, at least alive, but I often heard, by the shepherds in Buckerly's employ, that the bushrangers and he were at war, and that the result could be easily foretold. It seemed that the former were in the habit of taking a sheep or lamb, according to their fancy, whenever hunger dictated, and as they had always done; but Buckerly determined, very foolishly, to stop so unlawful a course, forgetting that he had every thing to lose, and the bushrangers nothing to gain. He was not strong enough to cope with them, and should have bided his time; but he was hot-headed and rash, and at length was unfortunate enough to kill a fellow who had slaughtered a sheep. From that day he was a doomed man, and not only brought destruction upon himself, but upon his family, for one night his house was attacked, and although he made a brave resistance, yet what could one man do against a dozen? He fell with countless stabs upon his body, and then the devils, the fiends incarnate, seized the poor woman and ravished her one by one. Luckily, she did not live to mourn her shame, but died the same night. The children were unmolested, and are now in Melbourne under proper guardianship, and derive their support from the same station, which is carried on by a shepherd who has been there for many years.

"Word was sent to me the day after the transaction, and I made an investigation, but the perpetrators of the outrage were never discovered. There is a tradition, however, and many shepherds in this district believe it, that on certain nights the ghost of Buckerly is seen wandering on the banks of the Loddon, with a winding-sheet covered with blood, and that those who look upon the apparition are sure to be overtaken by misfortune of some sort.

"I don't put much faith in the story," Mr. Brown said, edging towards me, for the night was beginning to grow quite dark, "but still I must confess to a feeling of superstition at times, and why should we not?"

Not knowing why we should not, I merely said, "Ah, indeed, why not?" and as the latter part of the story had awakened me as thoroughly as the first portion had set me to sleep, I refilled my pipe, lighted it, and endeavored, by puffing forth volumes of smoke, to compose my mind, and banish all recollections of ghosts and murders. The effort was futile, for Mr. Brown liked to discuss such matters.

"What is to prevent Buckerly and his wife from visiting this world, and wandering around the scene of their death?"

I hazarded a guess, and thought that want of breath, and a difficulty that they would experience in getting out of their graves without assistance, would prevent all such attempts.

"You know that their spirits live, and if that is the case, why can't they enter the body and walk about the earth without difficulty?"

Never having studied the subject, I could not enlighten Mr. Brown

as well as I should have desired to; but he apparently was more busy with his own thoughts than my answers, and continued, —

"If Buckerly should make his appearance before us while we were digging for gold, how would we treat him?"

"By giving him a drink from our private bottles," I answered, promptly.

"If he should speak to us, would it be well to answer him? I have read that if you exchange a word with a ghost, the unfortunate can be dragged off without the power to struggle."

"What splendid assistants they would make for private lunatic asylums. Patients could be carried off without trouble, and without attracting attention. I shall think of the matter again."

"Don't speak lightly of such serious matters," cried Mr. Brown, with more solemnity than I ever gave him credit for. "There are many things in this world that we cannot account for, and yet it is out of place to jest about them."

In fact, we were not in a favorable place to talk about ghosts and goblins, for the trees under which we were lying screened the light of the stars, and prevented us from seeing each other. Add to this the night wind wailing through the branches of the gum trees, and the profound silence that reigned around, interrupted only by the movements of the horses, or by the quiet gliding of a snake, which had been to the brook to quench its thirst, and barely ruffled a dead leaf in its course in search of companions. Taking all these things into consideration, I'll confess that I have passed many nights much more pleasant and satisfactory.

"Far be it from me to joke on matters of such grave import," I said. "I have no desire to incur the ill will of any respectable ghost, and, to tell you the truth, I don't think that one with any pretensions to piety would want to intrude his unwelcome presence upon us. There are people enough in the world who rather court such things, but I, for one, do not."

I started up, as I finished speaking, and clapped my hands upon the leg of my trousers, for I felt something squirming next to the skin that did not make me rest as though upon a bed of roses.

"What is the matter?" demanded Mr. Brown; "you don't see any thing, do you?"

"No," I replied, with all the composure possible, "I don't see any thing as yet — I wish that I could. But it strikes me that a snake has run up my trousers leg, and if I am not mistaken, he is wiggling to get out the wrong way."

"Crush him, and then we will hereafter further discuss the subject of ghosts," returned Mr. Brown, with admirable coolness.

"Ghosts be hanged!" I cried, and I have a faint recollection of adding an oath. "They don't trouble me half as much as the feelings of this varmint, whom I have secured by his head or tail, I don't know which."

"Shake yourself, and let him slide," my friend advised; but I preferred to hold on and trust to chance, and find out whether the reptile was of the poisonous species, or the common green kind.

"Excuse me, but if you will light a match and a few leaves, and then

insert your hand up one of my trousers legs, I think that we can conquer the reptile."

"The position which you assign me is none of the most pleasant, my friend," Mr. Brown said, "for I don't know what part of the reptile is in your hand, and what kind of an animal you are struggling with. I will comply with your request, though, if I lose my life in accomplishing it."

He hastily collected a few leaves, struck a match and set fire to them. The flames gave sufficient light for the purpose, and in less than a minute's time Mr. Brown was ready to work.

"Steady with your hand," he said, as he passed his arm up my trousers leg in search of the squirming reptile. "In less than ten seconds we shall be either laughing or crying."

The snake, as though aware that its time was near, made a desperate attempt to escape, but I held fast, although I confess that the effort cost me more mental resolution than I ever exercised before, for the position in which I was situated was no envious one. I felt the cold perspiration streaming down my face in large drops, and my heart beat as though it was attempting to force its way through my side, and go into business on its own account, independent of the body.

"For God's sake, be quick," I cried, fearing that I should faint before my friend accomplished his object.

"Patience, patience — don't get into a rage, for it will not help us. If the snake is of the poisonous species, a few seconds will not make much difference; and if the reptile is harmless, were it not for the feeling of the thing, it might as well lodge in your trousers as in any other part of our camp equipage. Don't jerk so — the thing has nerves as well as yourself."

Much more did Mr. Brown say, but I was in no humor to talk, or even to listen; and yet I can now frankly confess that if he had not made light of my misfortune I should have suffered ten times the amount of mental agony that I did. His jesting style of treating the affair was alone sufficient to make me keep up my spirits, and imagine the matter as one of less consequence than it really was.

"Now, then, are you ready?" cried Mr. Brown, and I felt the snake suddenly cease its gyrations and strain to effect its escape, but I held on with a hand of iron.

"When I say three, do you let go suddenly," my friend exclaimed.

I was only too willing.

"One."

"Two."

It seemed an age between the monosyllables, yet I held on patiently.

"Three."

I released my hold, and Mr. Brown, with a quick movement of his hand, dashed the reptile to the ground, and stamped upon it with his heavy boots.

"Now let us see what species it is," he said, kicking it towards the fire. A moment's examination, and a hearty laugh set my fears at rest.

"You might have slept with a dozen beneath you, and no harm would have happened. It is nothing but a green snake, and a small one at that."

I could hardly believe the welcome news, and a personal inspection was necessary to convince me of the fact, and then a strong drink from my flask was needful to compose my nerves, and render me a fit subject for sleep.

"Let me give you a word of advice," Mr. Brown said, joining me in the drink with wonderful alacrity. "Never again camp out without seeing that the bottoms of your trousers are shoved tight into the tops of your boots. This simple precaution sometimes saves much trouble and suffering. I again drink to your lucky escape."

"If you do, try the contents of your own bottle, then, for mine is running low."

Mr. Brown did not heed my request, and I had the satisfaction of hearing the liquor gurgling down his throat as though he liked it exceedingly; and when he did return the bottle, he gave me more fatherly advice, which was to the effect that I should carry a larger flask during my travels, if I expected to be successful in life, and die happy.

CHAPTER LXVI.

Journey after the Buried Treasure.

I have a distinct impression that I was thinking on the subject when sleep overtook me, and when I was awakened Mr. Brown was already rolling up his blankets and making his toilet.

"Come," he exclaimed, "let us be stirring before sunrise, and by ten o'clock we can reach the banks of the Loddon. Get the kettle from the pack, and we will have a cup of coffee for breakfast."

While I was unpacking the miscellaneous articles which the pack horse was compelled to carry, Mr. Brown started a fire, and in a short time the fumes of boiling coffee mingled with the fragrance of the numerous flowers which grew upon the banks of the stream.

"How did you sleep?" I inquired, while cooling my pot of coffee, and eating my cake of bread, seasoned with a small piece of salt pork, which I had broiled on a stick.

"Not very soundly, I must confess, yet I think that I can get through the day without a *siesta*. By the way, how you do snore!"

"Do?" I asked, "I didn't know that you was sufficiently awake during the night to discover the fact. But a truce to jesting. What direction do we travel to reach the Loddon?"

"We have got to ford this stream, and follow the bank for about three miles, where we cross the country in the direction of Mount Tarrengower, which we cannot see from this spot; after we have gained the Loddon, we are to find a sheep path that will lead us to a plain, in the centre of which is a small barren strip, surrounded on all sides, excepting one, with quicksands and bogs. Bill told me that the path would lead almost direct to the spot, and that I could not fail to recognize it,

as thousands of sheep resort there every week for the purpose of licking the salt that is constantly forming under the action of brackish water and a burning sun."

"And Mount Tarrengower — how far is that from the place indicated?" I inquired.

"Not more than a mile, I should judge, for at twelve o'clock at night the full moon, partly concealed by the mountain, throws a shadow exactly upon the edge of the spot where we are to dig."

I considered the direction rather blind, but Mr. Brown seemed so confident that I thought I would not dash his spirits by grave misgivings. I was in a reflective mood, however, while assisting to pack up, and saddle our animals, and I thought how Fred would laugh if we returned empty-handed.

We mounted our animals and rode along the bank of the stream for a few rods, until we reached what we supposed to be a good fording place, for we saw the prints of animals' feet in profusion on both sides of the brook.

"I will cross first," Mr. Brown said, "and then you can drive the pack horse over, and follow after him."

I made no objections to the suggestion, but I thought I would watch his course narrowly, and see how deep the dark-looking water really was before I ventured to cross upon what seemed to me a very uncertain soil.

"Here I go," my friend exclaimed, striking his reluctant animal, who didn't appear to relish the expedition.

The spirited animal bounded under the blow, and dashed down the bank, sinking to his knees at every step in the light soil, and straining badly to carry his master in safety to the opposite side. The water was only up to the saddle girths, and the stream was not more than twenty feet wide, yet I feared that both horse and rider would sink before my eyes in the treacherous quicksands which composed the bed of the brook.

"Use whip and spur," I shouted, "or you will lose your horse."

Mr. Brown understood his danger full as well as myself. He lifted the animal with his bridle, and then drove his sharp spurs into his panting sides, but in spite of his most violent exertions the gallant gray floundered about, and did not make an inch headway, and with prompt action was alone enabled to draw one foot and then another from the sands, and prevent being swallowed alive.

The dark water was lashed into foam by the struggle, and yet I could offer no assistance to my friend or his horse. It seemed to me that each moment the latter was sinking deeper and deeper, and in a few moments must disappear from sight.

Mr. Brown appeared to entertain the same opinion, for he disengaged his feet from the stirrups, and threw himself from the animal, striking the water flat upon his stomach, and swimming, with quick strokes, towards the opposite bank, which he gained, and by aid of the branch of a gum tree, which overhung the brook, succeeded in swinging his light form upon solid earth.

The horse, relieved of the weight of his rider, seemed encouraged to renewed exertions, and after prodigious efforts, emerged from

the quicksands, and uttered a neigh, as though rejoicing at his escape.

"You will have to go farther up," shouted Mr. Brown, shaking himself, and looking at his soiled clothes rather ruefully. "The bed of the brook is so quidling, that it won't bear the weight of a mosquito; and if you should commence sinking, the Lord only knows when you would stop, or where."

Not wishing to test the truth of his assertion, I rode along the bank of the brook nearly a mile, until I found a place where the water was more than six inches deep, with a solid bed of gravel. At this spot I crossed without trouble, and then we continued our journey across the country, Mount Tarrengower looming up before us like a giant amid pigmies.

"Devilish narrow escape for me and the horse," Mr. Brown said, while walking our animals over some rough ground; "I thought at one time that we both would have to go under, and I began to think of a prayer or two. I knew something would happen to us after talking about poor Buckerly in the manner that we did."

"Do you really think so?" I asked, hardly knowing whether he was quizzing me or was serious.

"Upon my word I am not jesting. I have too much superstition in my composition to think of spirits in any light, excepting that of the utmost respect; for why should not the dead revenge themselves upon the living if so disposed?"

"If that is your belief, how do you reconcile the fact of your having killed so many bushrangers, and yet escape their persecutions?" I inquired.

"Simply because the bad have not the power to injure the good."

I laughed so heartily at the explanation, that even my friend suffered his grim visage to relax a little.

"You may smile," he said, "but it's just as I tell you."

I saw that he was in earnest, so let the matter drop — but the conversation was afterwards renewed and discussed in all its lights and bearings, but still without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion.

It was near twelve o'clock when we reached the river, which was about three feet deep and forty wide. After hunting for some time we discovered the ford, and crossed without difficulty. We found ourselves in an immense grazing district, where ten thousand sheep could have been pastured without trouble or fear of their suffering for food.

The difficulty which we then experienced was to find the right path that was to lead us to the salt lick, but even that was overcome at length, and we galloped along the trail which we supposed that Bill meant, with bright anticipations of a successful termination of our mission.

Suddenly Mr. Brown reined up, and called to me to stop a moment.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, pointing with his whip towards a cluster of gum trees and bushes that stood upon a small mound near our right, "I saw a human being dodge behind one of those trees, after watching us for a few minutes."

"Let us make an examination," I replied. "We want no spies upon our actions in this matter, and if we are to be followed, we had better find out what is wanted."

I turned my horse's head as I spoke, and was riding in the direction indicated, when my friend stopped me.

"Don't be rash in this matter, for we don't know how many men are concealed in that clump of bushes, watching our movements. Let us ride on and stop when concealed by those trees in the distance. From that place we can watch movements in this quarter securely."

I considered Mr. Brown's advice the best, and we adopted it without further discussion. Once or twice I looked back, but I could see nothing that would excite suspicion, and I began to think that my friend's fears were groundless.

When once concealed, however, beneath the shadow of the trees we dismounted, and watched patiently — and were presently rewarded by seeing a man, armed with a long gun, steal quietly from the bushes which we had passed, and make towards Mount Tarrengower as though in a hurry to reach some location without a moment's delay.

"It is no use to give chase," Mr. Brown said, seeing me make a movement towards my horse. "Even if we should bring the fellow to close quarters, one of us would have to bite the dust; for let me tell you a secret that may be of some value to you hereafter in case you are anxious for a fight. Every man in this country who carries a long gun is a good shot, and can hit his object with as much certainty as your famed Kentucky riflemen. So you can see that we should get no honor or profit by giving chase to yonder long-legged fellow, who, if I am not much mistaken, is better acquainted with this section of the country than ourselves. Let him go. He is probably a shepherd; been on a visit to a neighboring station, or else out on a tour of observation to look after bushrangers."

"How near are we to a station?" I asked, still following with my eyes the tall form of the stranger, who jumped from side to side with scarce an effort, and who did not appear to regard the heat any more than a salamander.

"As near as I can judge," my companion said, "we are still on the lands belonging to the Hawswood station, although I am not certain. Adjoining those lands is a station owned by a number of Melbourne merchants, and the stock-house should be off towards the mountain. At least, it was there three years ago, during the first and only time that I ever visited these parts."

"Here we are at last," Mr. Brown said, pointing to a small strip of land containing not more than a quarter of an acre, surrounded by those treacherous bogs which are familiar to all who ever visited the plains of Australia.

"That must be the spot indicated," he continued, surveying it with a keen eye, "yet I can see no means of reaching the island. The bog, which looks crusted over and hard, would not bear the weight of a lamb, much less that of a man; yet that is just such a spot as a shrewd bushranger would select for depositing his plunder, simply because no one would think of looking there for it."

"Let us dismount and stake out our animals, and then examine the spot at our leisure. If that is the place, we will find means for reaching it, even if we have to build a bridge, or buy a pontoon of India rubber."

My companion accepted the advice, and under the shadow of a cluster of stunted, gnarled trees, we removed the saddles, and then prepared our dinner, which we stood in some need of, having been without food from the time that we started in the morning, long before sunrise.

"I wish that a flock of sheep would stray this way," Mr. Brown said, while scraping some dried grass together for the purpose of making a fire, while I was occupied in undoing the pack which contained our provisions, as well as our tools and cooking utensils; "I feel like having a mutton chop for supper," he continued.

"Behold your wish," I replied, pointing to a flock of about a thousand sheep, led by a patriarch, whose horns proclaimed many hard-fought battles, just winding their way towards the salt lick from behind a small knoll that stood between us and Mount Tarrengower.

Mr. Brown coolly drew his revolver, and apparently calculated the distance.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked, seating myself on the pack, and watching his proceedings.

"Have a mutton chop for supper, if those animals come within pistol shot. Keep quiet, and don't alarm them, and you will see how delicate I will do the trick."

I was too hungry to make many objections, and therefore followed the advice of my friend. On came the flock, the old patriarch at their head, unsuspicious of danger, and thinking probably of the rich treat which he was about to confer upon his numerous harem, by allowing them to partake of a bit of salt grass at the close of the day.

We were so well concealed by the trunks of the trees, that the sheep, generally wild and suspicious of strangers, did not discover us until the old ram was within about two rods of our hiding place; then he suddenly stopped, and snuffed the air as though he smelled an enemy, and the flock, governed by his actions and motions, likewise halted and looked around, to discover the cause of the commotion.

For a few seconds all was quiet, with the exception of a number of bleating lambs in the rear, and just as the ram was once more elevating his head to scent the air, Mr. Brown fired. A fine fat ewe sprang into the air, and then rolled over and over in the agonies of death.

"A good shot!" cried Mr. Brown, but hardly were the words from his mouth when there was a rushing sound, and before I could interfere, or raise my voice in warning, the old patriarch had charged past me. My comrade saw his danger, but disdained to use his revolver in such a quarrel, or even to fly. He probably thought that he could seize the ram by his horns, and arrest his career without a violent effort, but if such were his intentions he was bitterly disappointed, for the old patriarch possessed the strength and power of a dozen ordinary sheep, and possibly had battled with many bushrangers for the preservation of his flock from decimation.

On rushed the ram with the speed of a race horse. He passed me without notice, his eyes glowing like coals of fire, and every muscle in his neck stretched for the encounter. His wives did not offer to fly, but stood watching the result of the old fellow's charge, evidently quite confident of the ultimate result.

When the ram was within three feet of my companion, he thought

that it was about time to make good his retreat, seeing that his opponent was disposed to be in earnest.

Mr. Brown started back suddenly, and then turned to dodge behind a tree where he could have laughed his enemy to scorn. But unfortunately he was too late in making up his mind, and just as he turned, the ram struck him upon that portion of his body which presents the broadest basis, and in a twinkling over went my friend, as though shot from a mortar.

I could not, for the life of me, help laughing at the sight, and yet I was not disposed to interfere between them. It was a fair fight, and I wanted to see it out.

I will give the ram the credit of acting in a fair and manly manner, for after he had floored his opponent, he stood perfectly still until Mr. Brown began to scramble up, and after he had gained his knees, the old fellow evidently labored under the impression that more work was cut for him. With a fierce stamp the ram retreated a few feet, and then rushed on like lightning. Mr. Brown was thrown headlong to the ground, and then he began to look upon the contest as one not to be despised. I heard the click of his revolver, and I knew that his thoughts were deadly, but I resolved to save the life of so gallant an opponent.

"Don't fire," I shouted; "it is a pity to kill the old fellow for defending his wives. How would you like it?"

"Call him off then, or d—— his long horns, I'll blow a hole through him large enough to take in a pack saddle," cried Mr. Brown, still maintaining his recumbent attitude, as though no longer desirous of provoking a battle.

The task was not difficult. Indeed the ram had grown so inflated with victory that he was ready to pitch into every thing living, and I had only to show myself and manifest a hostile attitude to accomplish my purpose. The very first motion that I made with my head attracted his attention. He turned from a fallen foe with disdain, and braced himself for a new conflict. I made a second motion with my head suggestive of butting, and on he came, but I was prepared for him. Springing nimbly aside, I let him strike the hard pack saddle with all his force, and the result did not disappoint me. The saddle yielded, and over and over went the ram, until he picked himself up about two rods from the spot where I stood awaiting a renewal of the attack with much patience.

I did not have to wait long. With a toss of his shaggy head the old fellow took deliberate aim, and came towards me. I waited until he got under full headway, and then stepped behind a tree that my body had screened. The crash was terrible. The ram rebounded several paces, and rolled over and over, kicking violently, and when he did struggle to his feet he winked his eyes rapidly, as though afflicted with a headache of a violent nature. For a few minutes we stood looking at each other in silence, and then the old patriarch wagged his tail slowly, and moved towards his wives, with rather a crestfallen appearance.

CHAPTER LXVII.

The Hunt for the Buried Treasure.

"How do you feel?" I asked of my companion, who was sitting where he had fallen the second time.

"Feel," he replied, placing his hand upon that portion of his body supposed to be the sorest, "why I could readily imagine that I had ridden a hard trotting horse all day."

"Why didn't you spring aside?" I asked; "you saw the animal measuring the distance, and could have got out of the way."

"Can a man dodge a streak of lightning or a thunder bolt? If he could, there would be some use attempting to get beyond the reach of that crooked horn devil when he starts on a butting expedition. I believe no bones are broken, for which, I suppose, I must feel thankful."

My friend arose, shook himself, and then declared that he felt no serious inconvenience from his bruises; and while I started a fire he undertook to skin the sheep, and get a portion of his meat ready for dinner.

It was near four o'clock before we got ready to commence our explorations of the island where we supposed the treasure to be concealed. I suggested carrying the shovel, but Mr. Brown, with a degree of superstition that I was not prepared to give him credit for, would not listen to the idea for a moment, on the pretence that if we made any movement for the treasure, except during the night time, we should be defeated in our purpose.

I laughed at such a whim; but it was in vain that I attempted to change his ideas, and then to humor him, so that in case we were not successful in our search, no blame could be attached to me, I consented to be governed as he wished, and we walked towards the spot which corresponded with the directions of Bill Swinton.

We found the island, a rather small spot of earth, as he had stated, surrounded by bogs, with the exception of a narrow peninsula, not over a foot in width, and more than forty in length. It was a singular formation, surrounded as it was on all sides by soft mud, black and bottomless, for I attempted with the branch of a tree, some thirty feet long, to sound, but the limb sunk slowly out of sight, and the slime quickly gathered in the opening, and hid the place where the pole went down. I thought if one of us should lose his balance and fall while crossing the natural bridge, what little probability there would be of a rescue. The same sentiments disturbed the mind of my friend, for he uttered words of caution, and even removed a good sized stone that was lying on the path, for fear of stumbling over it in the night time.

We walked carefully to the island — as I shall call it — and then examined the unequal surface of the ground for indications of what we sought. The grass was dried up, and seemed to be of equal length in every gulley and every hole that we passed over; neither could we discover any indications that the earth had been moved for many years, but that was not surprising, for the winter rains would have washed

away all superfluous soil, even if a man like Swinton, who was cunning and up to all kinds of dodges, had not taken the precaution to remove all traces of his concealed treasure.

"It is no use," Mr. Brown said, wiping the perspiration from his face, and seating himself on a small rock, "for us to dig at random. We should get nothing for our labor. We must wait until to-morrow night, when the moon fulls, and precisely at twelve o'clock a shadow will be cast upon the spot."

"If the sky is filled with clouds what are we to do?" I asked.

That was something that Mr. Brown had not thought of. He mopped his face with renewed energy, and looked puzzled.

"Can't we make a calculation if such a thing should happen?" my companion inquired.

I didn't know but that we might, and relieved the heart of Mr. Brown of a great weight by the admission.

It was useless for us to sit there and speculate; so after another hasty glance over the island, with no better luck than before, we returned to our camp, and got ready for passing the night, which was fast approaching.

As soon as it was dark, however, and while Mr. Brown was getting ready his blankets, I suggested, much to his astonishment, a change in our camp, and recommended retreating to the banks of the Lodden, where we could find water for our animals, and good quarters for ourselves.

"In the name of humanity, haven't we travelled enough for one day?" my friend demanded. "The horses will not suffer for water, because a heavy dew is falling. We have a keg full for our own use, and what more do you desire?"

"I have a great reluctance to waking up and finding a knife held at my throat," I replied, "by some gentleman who has more courage than money. We have a pretty establishment here, and many a bushranger would be glad to relieve us of our property without asking permission."

"Pooh! there's no danger of their finding us under these trees. Go to sleep, and get a good night's rest, and to-morrow we will have another search for the treasure."

"Listen a moment, and then judge whether my advice is needless. We have been seen, and our footsteps dogged to-day, by some person not desirous of our acquaintance. Do you suppose that he lost sight of us for a moment, from the time we passed the gum trees until we went into ambush to watch his movements? Don't you think that if the stranger is disposed to bring a flock of devils on our track, he could find us here while sleeping? whereas, if we quietly move our animals to the river, we shall throw him off the scent and rest secure. What do you think of the idea?"

"I like the plan, and wonder that I never thought of it," replied Mr. Brown, starting up and hastily securing his blanket. "Let us lose no time in getting back to the river."

We carried our pack a short distance from the trees and concealed it in a clump of bushes, and then mounting our horses we quietly walked them the whole distance to the Lodden, where we found a secure place for camping, and with confidence in our scheme we went to sleep, and rested undisturbed until morning.

At daybreak we were on our way back to the island, and found our pack where we had left it, but Mr. Brown's quick eye detected a change in its appearance.

"Some one has overhauled our stores during the night," he said, "and hang me if the scamp has not drank all my liquor."

He held up his flask to confirm his words. It was empty, but I pretended that he must have drank it himself by mistake.

"Don't tell me that I don't know when good liquor is running down my throat, and that I used all I brought in one day. Haven't I been unusually careful, and drank from your flask two or three times, so that mine would hold out for the trip? Whoever the thief is, and I hope to see him some day, he deserves a halter."

An examination showed that every article that was in the pack had been taken out and then replaced carefully, but we missed the largest portion of our coffee and sugar, and over two thirds of our tobacco. If the robber had been a malicious one he could easily have carried off all that we possessed, but as he did not I was disposed to pardon him. Not so with Mr. Brown, however. He vowed vengeance, and was only appeased when I gave him a drink from my flask, which I luckily had carried with me the night before, to be used in case of snake bite.

I had but little doubt that the mysterious robber was the same person whom we had seen the day before, and I could readily believe that he was laughing at our dismay, at no great distance, and watching our movements with some curiosity. I regretted that I had not brought Rover with me, for he would have been worth a dozen sentinels in the night time, but owing to Fred's strong solicitations I had left him at the store in Ballarat. There was no help for us now, and we determined to put as good a face on the matter as possible, to husband our resources, and go on a short allowance of the two great staples in a campaign — rum and tobacco.

We passed the day by visiting the island and sleeping by turns. Towards night we carried our tools to the place where we expected to dig for the gold, and starting before sundown rode our animals to the river and watered them, so that they would not break away from their stakes during the night for the purpose of slaking their thirst. Then we waited impatiently for darkness for the purpose of once more changing our camping ground, and this time we left nothing behind. Our quarters were fixed at a short distance from the island, so that when the moon was up we could keep our eyes on the horses, yet not be seen on the main land.

At eleven o'clock the first rays of the full moon became visible from behind Mount Tarrengower. The night was awful quiet, and not a living thing had approached us, and not a sound had we heard, except an occasional bleat of a lamb, off towards the stock-house on our left.

"Let us be moving for the island," Mr. Brown said, almost in a whisper, for the solemnity of the scene was bringing back all his superstitions and fears.

I readily consented, and, lighting our pipes, we walked slowly towards the peninsula, crossed it, and then waited calmly for the shadow which the mountain was to throw upon the spot of earth where the robber's treasure was buried. Our pickaxe and shovel remained where we had

left them, although I could not help fancying that they had been handled since I had thrown them down. I said nothing to my friend on the subject, however, for he was too full of imaginative fancies to be consulted and listened to.

Time passed slowly while we sat and watched the shadow which was creeping over the bogs, as the moon rose behind the mountain. I consulted my watch and found that it was nearly twelve, but just at that moment a white cloud passed over the moon, and our hopes seemed dashed. The shadow was no longer to be seen; we watched that white cloud as though our lives depended upon its disappearing, but still it lingered, like a veil covering the face of a coquette — anxious to reveal the beauty which was concealed, yet taking pleasure in exciting expectation.

"What time is it?" whispered Mr. Brown.

I held my watch before him, while I again scanned the heavens.

"It is just twelve o'clock," my companion whispered.

Hardly had the words escaped his lips, before the cloud disappeared, and the moon looked down with a roguish twinkle. We started to our feet, when, lo! precisely where we stood was the edge of the shadow, cast in the form of a cross, with the upper part resting towards us.

Mr. Brown seized the pickaxe and struck it into the ground, and as he did so I thought that I heard a low groan. I could not tell in what direction it came from, yet I would have sworn that it originated on the island. I glanced at the face of my companion, but he was too intent upon the business before him to notice my look, or to pay any attention to the sound that had disturbed my composure.

"There is one thing I wish to caution you about," my companion said, pausing in his work; "don't speak while we are digging, or the gold will vanish from our sight like magic. You understand."

I nodded in the affirmative, although I had no faith in his advice, or in the necessity of maintaining silence. I considered that the devil and his imps would not care about interesting themselves in a matter which could do them no good, and might hurt their friends.

Mr. Brown glanced around the island, saw that every thing was quiet, and then recommenced his labor with energy and determination.

About the second blow that he struck was answered by a groan so unearthly that I began to entertain serious ideas regarding the propriety of joining a church, or attempting a prayer of some sort. My companion did not seem to notice the interruption, and I remembered his instruction not to speak, so I did not intrude my thoughts in relation to the matter upon him.

A dozen blows with the pickaxe removed the dead grass, and exposed a soil such as two thirds of Australia is composed of, a light sand, soft, and not suitable for agricultural purposes.

Mr. Brown made a motion for me to use the shovel, and I was about to do so, but a groan, louder and more unearthly than the original ones, prevented me.

"What, in the devil's name, is that?" demanded my friend, looking around the island with some symptoms of alarm and curiosity, forgetting, in his eagerness for information, that speaking aloud was strictly prohibited while digging for the gold.

"Perhaps one of your ghosts that you have talked so much about, or it may be the spirit of Bill Swinton, desirous of claiming a share in the booty."

"I don't think that," my friend said, after a short pause; "after all the trouble I had with him — furnishing the candles to die by, and allowing him luxuries of the most costly description, I don't think that he would be so mean."

"Then let us solve our doubts by making search over the island," I replied, drawing my revolver, determined to shoot at whatever I saw, let it be man or beast, devil or ghost.

"No, no — don't do that; we should be decoyed into a bog by an *ignis fatuus*, and smothered without mercy. Let us stay where we are, and dig until we see sights that make us abandon the project."

I agreed to be guided by Mr. Brown's advice, and once more we began to toil amid the rocks and dead grass.

About this time the moon, which had shone with wonderful brightness while we were digging, became obscured by white clouds from the westward, so that objects on the island were more indistinct, and even the trees on the main land, under which we had left our horses, were no longer discernable.

I thought, as I threw out the earth from the hole which we had already made, that the ground had been dug up before, and I felt encouraged to continue my labors, in hopes that we should soon reach the treasure which we considered belonged to us by bequest.

All thoughts of ghosts and spirits were fast passing away in the excitement of my occupation, when suddenly Mr. Brown dropped his pickaxe and uttered an exclamation.

"Did you hear that?" he cried, pointing in the direction from whence he supposed the sound proceeded.

"No," I answered, beginning to feel a little of his own alarm.

"If this d——d island isn't haunted, I wouldn't say so," my companion continued.

"Remember the compact which you proposed, that we were not to exchange a word during our occupation."

"The devil take the compact, and me, too, if I can help speaking when I hear such unearthly noises."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when from the earth arose a form that seemed at least ten feet high. It was clothed in white, and from its head projected two monstrous horns, which were pointed towards us in a threatening manner. I could discern no features, but a huge mass of white bones were visible where the face should have been, and I thought that I could hear them rattle as the beast, devil, or ghost shook its head in an ominous manner, and advanced towards us.

"I can't stand this?" cried Mr. Brown, in a trembling whisper, and away he went, with the speed of a greyhound, towards the bridge that connected the island with the main land.

I did not think that words were desirable or becoming on my part, as I did not have charge of the expedition, so no sooner had Mr. Brown turned to run than I followed him.

Fear lent me wings, and I bounded over the rocks like a deer pursued by hunters, but in despite of my utmost endeavors I found that I was

unable to compete with my friend, who ran as though trained for ten mile stretches upon a race course.

Once I looked back to see if we were followed, but the white visitant appeared content with driving us off, for no pursuit was made.

I had half an idea of stopping, but another groan, more unnatural and ghostly than any that I had heard, determined me, and I recommenced my flight with but faint hope of overtaking Mr. Brown, who, I perceived, was already on the peninsula, bounding along with a recklessness that would have made him shudder at any other time. I attempted to utter a warning cry, but the effort was a failure, and just as I reached the bridge I saw that my worst fears were realized, for my friend caught his feet in the long, dried grass, lost his balance, and fell heavily.

I quickly gained the spot, and saw, to my horror, that my companion had fallen upon the soft, black mud which extended for many acres on each side of the island, and that he was slowly sinking, in spite of his frantic efforts to reach the bridge, which was about six feet from his outstretched arms.

"Save me!" he cried, in despairing accents, and just then the moon, as though in mockery of his request, shone out brighter than ever.

He made an almost superhuman effort to sustain himself, and keep from sinking, but I saw, with horror, that he was settling slowly and surely, and that all his struggles only hastened his end.

"Can you do nothing for me?" he shrieked. "For God's sake, don't let me die such a horrid death as this. Try and save me."

I thought of a dozen different ways to assist him, but none of them were practicable, and I was obliged to conjure up others.

"Can you reach my hand?" I asked, stretching it towards him, first taking the precaution of twisting my left hand in a clump of dried grass, so that I, too, should not be dragged into the bog.

The poor fellow made a frantic effort to do so, but he could not reach within six inches.

"Lean a little more towards me," he shrieked, but I did not dare to, for I should have shared his fate, and both of us would have smothered, and our friends would never have learned our fate.

My companion uttered a groan, and for a moment was silent. During the brief period, I heard, with awful distinctness, the sound of the pickaxe, as it was struck against the rocks upon the island, worked, I had no doubt, by supernatural hands.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

The Island Ghost.—Narrow Escape of Mr. Brown.

I would sooner have faced the most savage gang of bushrangers in Australia than that fearful sound, yet I was so anxious to save my friend that, frightened as I really was, I did not run, or even make a motion to

that effect. The drowning man, with face upturned, and eyes that watched my every motion, at length heard the dull, heavy blows of the pick, and he seemed to comprehend that they were intended as warnings of his end. He no longer struggled like a brave man wrestling with death, but seemed to grow more calm as the slime and mud closed around him, and his body settled.

"How can I save you?" I asked; "I cannot think that we are to part so suddenly; I would give all my wealth for a rope six feet long."

"If you had one of the horses' bridles here," suggested Mr. Brown, but before I could start to get one, he continued, "don't leave me, for I should be smothered before you could get back; see, the water is up even with my chin."

I had noticed the same thing before he alluded to it, and I dreaded to remain and hear his last struggles for breath.

"I have a mother somewhere on the coast of England; the last that I heard of her she was at Falmouth. Will you write and collect what money I have saved, and send it to her? I know that you will, and a dying man thanks you."

While the poor fellow was speaking, a thought entered my head that he might yet be saved, but there was no time to lose if I intended to put into operation my plan for his relief. I hastily tore off my belt which I wore around my waist, and which contained my revolver and knife, and then stripped off my trousers, (the ladies will please not to blush — there was no habitation within three miles of us,) made of stout woollen cloth, which I had bought in Melbourne for the purpose of riding through the brush on horseback.

In an instant my friend appeared to comprehend my plan; he raised his right hand from the mud and reached towards me as far as possible, and then, with a struggle to keep his head above the water, murmured, —

"Quick, for God's sake, quick!"

"Keep up your courage," I shouted, throwing one leg of the garment towards him, while I retained the other.

To my great joy I saw that he grasped it in his right hand, and exerted all his strength to extricate himself from his perilous condition. Had I not have been prepared for his struggles, and braced my feet firmly, I should have been dragged into the bog.

"Gently!" I cried, fearful that my friend, in his exertions, would rend the cloth.

My words were thrown away, however, for when did a man, struggling for life, ever listen to reason? For a few seconds the suction was so great that I could only prevent him from sinking lower, and keep his head above the mud, until at length I recommended him to endeavor to work his legs loose, so that he could rest upon his stomach, as though he was attempting to swim.

Brown followed my advice, and when he saw that there was a certain prospect of being saved he grew quite calm, and soon I had the satisfaction of reaching out my hand, grasping one of his own, and dragging him upon the peninsula, a little the worse for his contact with the bog, but cheerful, and disposed to regard his adventure in the light of a joke.

"My dear friend," he exclaimed, clasping my hand, and I thought he was about to pour forth a profusion of thanks for my services, "let me advise you to put your trousers on as soon as possible, for these blasted mosquitoes will devour you alive."

I think that his recommendation was the best evidence of his attachment that I could possibly have desired, for I had been so inwrapt with the business before me that I had not heeded the cloud of ferocious insects hovering around my naked extremities, filling their bodies with my life blood, and causing me to almost desire a bath in the bog, for the purpose of getting rid of my tormentors.

I hurried on my clothes without loss of time, and then desired to know in what manner I could help him.

"Let me get away from this place first, and then secure a wash, and a change of clothing, for I feel as though I had been fished out of a molasses hogshead," Mr. Brown said, scraping the mud from his shirt and pants, and even taking it from his pockets by handfuls.

"What made you run in the manner that you did?" he asked, as I assisted him to rise.

"I but followed your example, and I begin to think that I followed a very poor one," I replied.

"I am of the same opinion, for I don't believe that we saw any thing excepting a ram anxious for a bunting match. Let us return."

As my friend ceased speaking we glanced at the island, and that one look was sufficient to start us towards the main land in double quick time, for, standing at the end of the peninsula, with one arm raised in a threatening manner, as though warning us against a renewed attempt for the treasure, was the white figure which had first frightened us.

"That is Buckerly's ghost," gasped Mr. Brown, as we gained the palm trees under which the horses were hitched; "I know it is his spirit, from the many descriptions which I have heard concerning it."

"What do you propose to do?" I asked, beginning, now that I was some distance from the object of my terror, to entertain serious doubts in relation to the spirituality of the visitant.

"Do?" repeated Mr. Brown, "what can we do against a ghost?"

"We can at least find out what claims it has upon the treasure, and whether it requires a fair dividend in case we are successful. Come, change your clothes, and let us return and question this wonderful visitant."

"Would you dare to speak first?" demanded Mr. Brown, in astonishment. "Don't you know, or have you not read, that the person who holds conversation with a ghost dies within a week?"

"A week is better than a day, so we can have time to think of our sins and get prepared for the event. Come, let us return like men and face this white object, and see what kind of stuff it is made of."

While I was urging Mr. Brown I did not have the faintest idea that he would accede to my request. In fact, I rather hoped that he would not, for, in spite of my expressed doubts in relation to the ghost, I was more than half inclined to believe that there was something supernatural about it. A desire to make my companion think that I was more reckless than himself prompted me to attempt to combat his fears.

While I was talking, Mr. Brown was changing his clothes, and getting

a portion of the mud from his person by means of the contents of the water-keg, and when he had succeeded I think that his courage revived, for he asked me for the loan of my flask; and when I handed it to him, he lowered its contents materially, and then declared that he felt better than when he was up to his neck in mud.

"You say that you are anxious to return and have an interview with the old fellow with horns on his head?" Mr. Brown asked, and I observed a wonderful change in his bearing all at once, which I could only attribute to putting on clean clothes, or due to the magical influence of my flask. I was inclined to the latter opinion, and therefore tasted the liquor for the purpose of seeing if I could not get a little Dutch courage.

"The fact of it is," my friend continued, "I am inclined to think that we have been frightened at a shadow, and therefore I am in favor of returning to the island without delay. No blasted ghost is to keep me from the treasure which was bequeathed to me in due form by its owner, and for which I paid him in candles, six to a pound. How does the liquor hold out?"

I shook the flask, and found that almost half a pint remained.

"I think that a quantity of salt mud got in my mouth, for I have a bad taste which nothing but brandy can remove. Let me have another spoonful, and then we will start with courage enough to face the devil.

"A man," my companion exclaimed, throwing back his head and looking full at the moon, "should never depend upon liquor for courage, for in the moment of danger he wants all his self-possession. I only make the remark," he continued, as he handed me back the empty flask, "to warn you against drinking any thing of an intoxicating nature upon the eve of an important expedition."

"Your advice is good," I remarked, "and to help me carry it out you have drained the flask of its last drop. The next time we go on an expedition, I wish that you would practise what you preach."

"This is an ungrateful world," Mr. Brown remarked, as he rose from the saddle upon which he had been seated, and steadied himself by holding on my shoulder. "I have drank your liquor merely out of friendship, and now I am reproached for my kindness; I didn't expect it."

"I didn't expect that you would help yourself so liberally," I replied, laughing at his quiet humor. "But come along, if you intend to reach the island before day, for it's said that ghosts don't walk during daylight."

"Look first to your revolver, for mine is in a deplorable condition, and wouldn't go if I should carry it. The barrel is filled with mud, and the chambers with salt."

"Remember, there is to be no running away this time," I said, as I replaced my revolver in my belt, having found it in good order and condition. I almost wished, as I spoke, that Brown would decline going, and find some valid excuse for declining. But there was no hope for that. He had drank too much, and was as full of pluck as an Irishman on a Fair day.

"No fear of me, my boy," he cried, as we started towards the penin-

sula, walking rather slow, however. "I am determined to see what kind of a devil is on the island, even if I tumble into the bog again. You are sure," he continued, "that the liquor is exhausted?

"Every drop."

"I am sorry for that, 'cos it is good to keep the stomach in order, when mixed with a little river water. Although, to save trouble, I like it, as a general thing, with as little of the latter as possible, for fear of disorders and snakes."

We were within five rods of the bridge, when we suddenly stopped, as though by mutual consent, and looked at each other for a few moments in silence.

"Well?" said my companion.

"Well," I answered.

"Are you going to the island or not?" demanded Mr. Brown.

"That is for you to say," I replied.

"The liquor is all gone?"

"Every drop," I answered.

"I think," said Mr. Brown, after a short pause, "that I would give a month's pay, including bribes, if I had a gallon of good whiskey by my side. A man who intends to combat the devil and his imps should have something besides powder and ball to fling at their heads."

"If you had the liquor," I replied, "neither of us would be in a condition, after a few drinks, to throw any thing at your ghosts. I know of one man who would throw himself upon the ground and sleep until morning, and let Bill Swinton and money go to the devil, where they belong."

"Pass on," whispered Mr. Brown, making way for me to proceed, the bridge being too narrow for both of us to walk abreast.

"Excuse me," I replied, "I think that I should follow on behind to prevent you from running away; or in case you again tumble into the bog, to lend a ready hand. You go first."

My friend hesitated for a moment, glanced eagerly towards the island, and seeing nothing objectionable, stepped foot upon the bridge and commenced the perilous journey.

I followed close at his heels, and when we reached the spot which was the scene of his experience in the bog, the slime and water had filled up the hole which his body made, and all looked hard and treacherous as ever. Mr. Brown pointed to the spot with his hand as he passed, but he neither turned nor made remark, although I thought I saw his form tremble at the recollection of his danger.

We were not more than two minutes in reaching the end of the bridge, and then we again paused to reconnoitre. Nothing to alarm us was to be seen, and we again ventured forward, this time with more confidence than we had felt since we had started.

"Your ghost has fled," I said, in a half whisper.

At that instant, as though to disprove my words, we heard a sharp, quick blow, that sounded like an iron shovel struck upon stones. We uttered no word, or made the least noise, but we turned our looks upon the largest portion of the island with wonderful quickness, and, as though of one mind, we attempted to reach the bridge by a precipitate flight.

Our intentions, however, were balked by our own eagerness, for just as I was about striking out my legs got mixed up with my companion's, and down we both went, full length, upon the ground. We scrambled to gain our feet, and I think that I arose first; but I had not recovered myself before I was seized by Mr. Brown in his frantic attempts to arise, and once more fell, and this time directly upon him, and over we rolled together until we were brought up by a large rock, which prevented us from going any farther.

"I think that we are two of the biggest fools in Australia," Mr. Brown said, sitting up and listening attentively.

I readily agreed with him, and determined to be no longer frightened by sight or sound. With this idea, and after a mutual vow to stand by each other, we crept along upon our hands and knees until we could command a view of the spot where we had dug for the treasure. While we were considering whether we should go forward or remain on the watch, the huge form which had so frightened us slowly arose, as though from a grave of its own digging, and, to our horror, we could see the white bones and long horns pointing towards us, while an unearthly groan relieved the monotony of the appearance.

With a trembling hand I drew my revolver, and, in defiance of Mr. Brown's whispered remonstrance, I took as good aim as I was capable of taking under the circumstances, and fired.

I heard a crashing of dry bones, and I saw the hideous head fall to the ground; at the same moment a gruff voice shouted, in angry tones,—

"What in the bloody h—l is you 'bout, hey?"

CHAPTER LXIX.

Capture of the Ghost.

At the sound of the voice, and more especially the hearty English oath, Mr. Brown sprang to his feet, drew his knife, and rushed towards the late supposed spiritual visitant.

All thoughts of fear were banished in an instant, as soon as we discovered that we had flesh and blood to deal with instead of grave-clothes and pithless bones.

"Surrender or die!" was the exclamation of Mr. Brown, as we neared the object of our late fears.

"Die be d——d! what do you mean?" was the question asked by the interesting individual who attempted to scrabble from the hole which he had been digging, but did not succeed before the ex-inspector was upon him.

"Stand back, or I'll let daylight into you," shouted the fellow, drawing a long knife, and acting upon the defensive, and the way he handled the reaper showed that he was in earnest.

We both hesitated for a moment, for the purpose of better addressing the person who was so peremptory in his threats, but first I took the precaution of possessing myself of a long smooth-bore gun which was lying near him, and which he had forgotten to seize upon being surprised.

The man before us was about six feet high, (when he appeared in the character of a ghost, we thought he would measure nine,) with long hair, and beard of fiery red, which seemed as though it had not felt the touch of comb or scissors for months. Two little eyes almost concealed, and overhanging eyebrows, glanced suspiciously at us, and watched our movements, with an evident impression that we intended mischief, and that if such was the case their owner was to be counted in for a fight.

Upon the back and person of the red-haired man were sheepskins, made to fit his body, with the wool outside. These we had imagined were grave-clothes, and had nearly broken our necks to escape from the wearer. We could not refrain from indulging in a hearty laugh at our late flight and the occasion of it, but our mirth made no impression upon the mysterious being before us.

"No ye don't," he shouted, brandishing his knife before our eyes as though we intended to entrap him into some snare. "You mustn't think that ye is goin' to fool an honest man who is digging for roots by the full of the moon."

"You dig rather deep for roots," said Mr. Brown, stepping to the edge of the excavation, and looking down in spite of the threatening appearance of the red-haired individual.

"I'll dig as deep as I please," he answered quickly.

"Of course I would," returned Mr. Brown. "Who knows but you may find a buried treasure there if you keep on digging?"

"Is that what you coveys was arter?" demanded the red head, with a degree of interest which he had not shown before. "I 'spected it when I seed you yesterday crossing the Lodden, and I determined to watch."

"What are you doing in this part of the country?" asked Mr. Brown, rather sternly, as a recollection of the loss of his bottle of liquor the night before began to dawn upon his mind.

"You have no right to question me any more than I have you," was the sulky response.

"Who are you then?" the other asked, somewhat impatiently.

"That's for you to find out the best way you can. If confidence is wanted, why, tell me who you are," and the red-haired genius seated himself on the edge of the excavation, as though awaiting an answer, although he still kept in sight his long and dangerous looking knife.

"I know who you are," my friend said, at a venture; "you are a shepherd on the Hawkswood estate. We are officers of the law from Ballarat."

"It's a lie," was the brief rejoinder. "I don't believe any thing of the kind."

"You d——d vagabond," cried Mr. Brown, snatching the long gun from my hand and presenting it to the fellow's heart, "I have a strong desire to blow your liver out."

"You wouldn't shoot a fellow with his own gun, would you?" the impudent scamp asked, without manifesting any serious apprehension of our doing so.

"Well, no, I hardly think that would be just," replied Mr. Brown, lowering the muzzle of the gun, and beginning to think that he had met with a strange customer, whom it was better to conciliate than to cross.

"Come, tell a feller who you is," the red-haired genius remarked; "do you belong to Buskin's gang, or is you on your own tramp?"

"Neither suggestion is correct — we are not bushrangers, and never expect to be. We are men of the law. Now tell us who you are," my companion said, calmly seating himself near the stranger, and lighting his pipe, — a proceeding that appeared to interest him intensely, for he snuffed the burning tobacco like a war horse within sight of a battle field.

"Just give me one draw of that 'ere pipe first," pleaded the would-be ghost, and his request was gratified.

"Real 'bacco, and a real clay pipe, by the bloody jingoes," he exclaimed. "It's many a day since I've had a taste of 'em afore."

In fact the tobacco appeared to open his heart amazingly, and in a short time we had his whole history.

"My name," the stranger said, "is Day Bly, although I'm commonly called Day, for short. I was dragged up in London, and when I was twelve years of age I was apprenticed to an undertaker. I used to take care of the shop, clean the hearse, and sleep in a coffin, with old pieces of mouldy velvet thrown over me to keep me warm in the night time.

"When I ate my meals, it was brought out of master's house by one of the servant girls, and set on a pine coffin, such as we used to furnish the poor devils who hadn't got much money, and who couldn't afford to go the expensive ones. When we had a holiday, such as Christmas, I'd slyly move the grub to one of the polished silver-plated affairs, and imagined that I was seated at a real mahogany table, and I tell you things use to taste better.

"I kept that up until one day I had a dish of meat, that, by some mistake, never satisfactorily accounted for, was really warm, and it took the polish from the slap-up affair, and left a white mark. For that I got licked, and rebuked for my presumption to aristocracy. I didn't mind a flogging in those days, 'cos I was use to 'em, and let me tell you that London 'prentices, as a general thing, get more blows than holidays."

"That's so," muttered Mr. Brown, who appeared to deeply sympathize with the speaker in that portion of his narrative.

"I grew up," continued the red-haired individual, whose cognomen was Day, "quite fond of corpses."

I shuddered, and turned my head to see if there were any lying near, for I didn't consider that the subject was a very proper one to talk about at that time of night, and under the circumstances I should have prepared a more agreeable topic.

"The gentleman needn't be afeard," muttered the fellow, with a sneer; "corpses won't hurt a feller, 'cos I've tried 'em."

He had seen me flinch at the word, and improved his opportunity to show his hardihood.

"In fact, as I growed older," Day continued, "I was quite useful in my way, and got trusted by master with some important jobs. I could lay out a poor covey, who hadn't any money, with as much despatch as any 'prentice in London, and when you come to the mourning part I was really terrible. I could groan more unearthly and oftener than any mute that master employed."

"Did you not give us a specimen to-night?" I asked.

"Well, yes, I think that I did pretty well to-night, but I was too anxious to frighten you off to pay particular attention to my business. I'll show you what I can do, if you'll just listen."

But I declined to hear him, and the undertaker's ex-apprentice continued his story:

"I used sometimes to be borrowed by rival undertakers just 'cos I could groan so beautiful, and had I been contented to have worked my way up in the world, until I got the position of head mute, I shouldn't be here, surrounded by this d——d cloud of mosquitoes, and not a particle of tobacco to put in my pipe, and no friend to offer me a bit."

The hint was so strong that I could not refuse to gratify our new acquaintance with a small piece of the weed, which was received with a grunt, expressive of gratitude.

"As I was saying," continued Day, filling his pipe while talking, "I was always an ambitious cuss, and used to like plenty of money to spend on dress and cheap jewelry, but I couldn't always get it; one day my fellow 'prentice made a proposal, which he stated would fill our pockets and enable us to sport 'round nights in great style. I was ready to listen to any thing that he had to offer, and then I learned that a doctor that lived next street wanted us to supply him with subjects, for which we were to receive two pounds each.

"Well, we used to go out nights with a cart, drive up to some burying ground, where we had planted a feller the day before, whip him out of his coffin, and be off in less than fifteen minutes. In that way we used to make a pretty good thing of it, and we had so much money that we could keep drunk about two thirds of the time. At length some meddling old fool suspected us, and one night we were caught by the police, with a body in our charge. We tried to shake the bloody swabs off, but it was no go. We were jugged, and the first thing I knowed my companion, who had put me up to the work, peached, and saved his precious carcass from being transported."

"How long was you sent for, Day?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Ten years — four of 'em I passed at hard labor, and then I got a ticket of leave, and came out here as a shepherd. I have been here two years last February, and should like well enough if I had plenty of 'bacco and rum. Them 'ere things is hard to get in this part of the world, and I haven't tasted a drop of rum for two months afore last night, when I got a sup out of your pack."

Mr. Brown ground his teeth with suppressed emotion.

"How dared you meddle with our property?" demanded my companion

"'Cos, how did I know it was yourn. I found the pack covered with

bushes, and I 'spose a man is entitled to what he finds in this part of the country?"

"That depends upon circumstances," replied Mr. Brown, with a cautious glance at the place where Day had been excavating. "For instance, if you have found a quantity of gold dust where you have been digging, it would not belong to you but to the lawful owners, or the agent of the owners, sent to recover it."

"I don't know about that," cried the red-headed genius, with a cunning glance from his little eyes, "but I do know that if I find any thing here I shall hold on to it until somebody stronger than myself comes along. I 'spose you would do so, and I shall."

"Before we quarrel on that point," I said, "perhaps you will inform us how you knew we were in search of hidden gold?"

"But I didn't know till I saw you begin to dig. I was lying under a palm tree when you crossed the Lodden yesterday, and I strongly suspected from your looks that you were bushrangers in search of a dish of mutton, in which case I should have tacked your bodies with a ball from my gun. I followed you a few steps, and then crossed your trail, skirted Mount Tarrengower, and from the summit of a gum tree I watched your motions until dark, when I stole towards your camp for the purpose of listening to your conversation. I heard enough to convince me that you were in search of hidden treasure, but before I could make out your plans you moved your camp to the Lodden, but left your pack behind, for which act of thoughtfulness I am much your debtor."

"And to defeat our plans you turned ghost," I said.

The red-haired genius chuckled as he answered, —

"I thought that the easiest way to get rid of you, for I have tried the character before with some success. Many a bushranger, anxious for a supper of fresh mutton, have I frightened into fits, and by that means my flocks are not molested near as much as my neighbors, ten or twelve miles from here. I like to play the ghost, too, for it reminds me of the time when I was living with plenty of half and half, and lots of 'bacco at my control. Wasn't my groans beautiful? People say that they is quite unearthly."

We felt ashamed to say that we considered them in that light, and therefore dropped the subject, although we encouraged him to relate the further history of his exploits.

"I got my sheepskins all ready during the day, 'cos I saw that you was idling round doing nothing, and I 'spected that the evening would be selected to begin work.

"I hunted up my old bullock's head, with the horns on, and which has seen some service, although I don't think that I shall be able to wear it again, 'cos your confounded pistol shot about used it up. Here it lays at your feet — examine it."

I found that the head had been cut and trimmed off, and then lined with pieces of old clothes, until it fitted the cranium of Day like a huge helmet.

The shot from my revolver had shattered the dry bones so that it was ready to tumble apart, and had to be handled quite carefully. I no longer wondered at our mistaking Day for the devil, and I congratulated myself that I was not frightened worse than I really was.

"I could hardly keep from yelling with laughter when I saw you two running, and then when I heard one of you tumble into the bog, I thought to myself that's an end of him. Now, Day, you jist go along and get the money that they expected to, and be a rich man for life."

"Then you knew that I was struggling for life, and would not come to my assistance?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Why should I?" demanded Day, with great *sang froid*. "I didn't know you or care for you. All that I desired was to drive you off as fast as possible, and d—— me if I didn't do it!"

"What did you think when you saw us return the second time?" I inquired.

"Well, the fact of it is, you rather started me then, 'cos I had no idea of the thing. I thought if I couldn't frighten you away with groans, my time as a ghost was 'bout over. You couldn't pay me for the head which you destroyed, could you?"

We declined to do so, and advised him to be thankful that he did not lose his life in his attempt to assume a character that did not belong to him; but Day treated our advice with neglect.

"If I couldn't hit a man at a distance of ten rods, ghost or no ghost, I'd never shoot again. Why, my old gun, that you hold on to as though you feared it would go off, can knock over a kangaroo at thirty rods distance, and never miss once out of a dozen shots. I tell you I have had to practise shooting since I have been a shepherd. The only thing my proprietor is liberal in furnishing is powder and lead."

I was just about requesting Day to remove his person from the place where he had been digging, to allow us to make an examination for the concealed treasure, when we heard the discharge of a gun in the direction of the mountain, separated from us by several valleys, where immense flocks of sheep were feeding.

The shepherd started to his feet, and looked eagerly in the direction of the sound; but nothing was to be seen.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Mr. Brown.

"It means that Buskin's band of bushrangers is all the more alarmed at the sound of your pistol. They will search every inch of ground between here and the Lodden, but they will find out the occasion of the firing, and if you are men of the law, as you say, the highest tree in this section will serve for your gallows to-morrow."

"You know the members of the gang?" asked Mr. Brown.

"I never exchanged a word with one of them in my life," cried the shepherd, with an air of sincerity, "although I have often held short communion with them in my assumed character."

He pointed to the bullock's head, and grinned as he spoke.

"How do you know that the firing was done by bushrangers?" I asked, suspiciously.

"For two reasons — first, a bushranger will never kill more game than he wants to eat at one time; and, secondly, the gang has been absent from these parts for two weeks, and undoubtedly want to rest and recruit. They can't do that until they know that the whole of this section is free from stragglers and spies. Me they care nothing about, and will not molest unless I am too inquisitive."

"How do we know that this is not a trick of yours to get us to leave this island?" I asked.

"'Cos I shall advise you to do no such thing. The only safe place for you is on this island, where you must stay until the woods between here and the Lodden have been searched, and the gang is confident that the parties who were in this vicinity have escaped."

"But why not escape now? Our horses are fresh and fast," I added.

"Because I suppose that a dozen men are watching the fords of the Lodden, and a bullet in your back would probably be the first intimation of the presence of a party of skulkers. No, sirs, unless you can skim over the surface of this bog, and then scale Mount Tarrengower, your only place of safety is on this island. Trust to me."

"And then lose our horses," I replied. "I suppose that the bushrangers would like no better plan; but I for one will not consent to that?"

"Which is the most valuable to you, your lives or your animals?" asked Day, bluntly.

"Can we not save our horses as well as ourselves?" Mr. Brown inquired, turning to me for advice.

I confess that I could see no way to preserve them; and I still insisted that we had better trust to the speed of the animals than remain in a state of inactivity and siege on the island.

My plans were overruled, however, by both Mr. Brown and the shepherd, on the ground that it would be impossible to escape before daylight, at which time the bushrangers would probably retire to the heart of the woods for rest and sleep, and all their outposts would then be withdrawn.

I was at length reluctantly compelled to yield my opinion to the others, although I could not help, as I did so, wishing for the presence of Fred and Smith, and I thought how different would be our conduct.

All idea of finding the buried treasure was at an end; and I began to feel as though I should be grateful if I escaped back to Ballarat with my life, minus the gold which was so great a temptation for us to undertake the journey.

"Well," asked the shepherd, "what have you concluded upon?"

"To remain on the island, I suppose," returned Mr. Brown, rather sulkily, "although I don't see how we are ever to get back to town if we lose our animals. I wouldn't walk to Ballarat for half of Australia."

"Can't we manage to make the horses walk the bridge, and keep them on the island with us?" I asked.

"A good idea," cried the red-haired genius, suddenly starting up, "and the only wonder is I never thought of it. There is some danger in the attempt, but nothing compared to stealing a body in a graveyard in the heart of London."

CHAPTER LXX.

The Ghost and the Bushrangers.

The shepherd, who seemed to weigh all emotions by the scale of a body snatcher, appeared to be delighted at the prospect of enjoying a little excitement, and began to examine the priming of his long gun with a degree of attention that showed how much reliance he intended placing upon it in case of emergency.

"I look upon you two coveys in the light of visitors to my possessions, and my honor is engaged to see that you come to no harm," cried the undertaker's apprentice, with a wave of his right hand, as dignified as though he owned the many acres indicated, instead of receiving only about fifty pounds per annum, not including his sugar and coffee.

I think that I expressed a proper degree of gratitude for the shepherd's promised protection, but I intimated that I had lived long enough in Australia to learn how to protect myself.

"Never you mind that," continued the red-haired man, busying himself with the bullock's head. "I shan't be wanting if a little fighting is to be done."

"Then lend us your aid in leading the horses over the bridge, and don't let us lose time in debating the project," I said, preparing to undertake the expedition in company with Mr. Brown.

"Don't be in a hurry. Wait for me, 'cos I'm the most important one here at present," continued Day, still working over the head which had so frightened my friend and myself.

"If you think that your presence is so necessary, we will convince you to the contrary by going without you," replied Mr. Brown, rather tartly.

"There you go," exclaimed the fellow, with perfect composure; "when I intend to do all that I can to save you coveys from being shot and then hung, you get as mad as foaming beer, and don't want to listen to reason. Be guided by me, and things will come out all right."

"I am not so sure of that," I replied, with an incredulous air.

"Seeing is believing then. You ain't got some strings in your pocket, have you?" our newly-found friend continued.

"Strings? no, we have something else to think about at the present time," cried Mr. Brown.

"I'm sorry for that, 'cos a few rods of twine or tape, such as we use to line coffins with, would be worth considerable just now."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you in as few words as possible," the shepherd said, resting from his work for a few seconds while speaking. "We three coveys ain't no match for thirty coveys, is we?"

We acknowledged that there was a difference, and that it was favorable to the side of the larger force.

"Very well; then it becomes necessary to deceive 'em, same as we use to do when I was an apprentice in London, when master would put a body in a pine coffin, all flourished off with paint and varnish, and then charge it as cherry."

"What has that to do with the matter in hand?" I demanded impatiently.

"Much — I intend to make the bushrangers think, if we come in contact with 'em, that they have got a ghost instead of a man to deal with, and I needn't tell you how frightened they will be; you know that by your own experience, don't you?"

There was no denying the assertion, however much disposed we might feel to quarrel with such perfect frankness at the present time. At any rate, we no longer manifested symptoms of impatience, but waited until Day had secured the bones, which were somewhat loosened by the shot from my pistol.

"I think that I've got strings enough arter all," he said, shaking the head to see if it was firm and fit for use. "It 'pears all right, and I think will answer."

He placed the huge mass of whitened bones upon his head, and then shook it in a defiant manner, and I no longer wondered at our fright.

"There, I think that will do. Now let me first tie up my sheepskins, and then we will start."

In a few minutes the sheepskins were secured in their proper places, and Day stood before us a ghost of the first magnitude, and looking hideous enough to frighten his Satanic Majesty himself had he been encountered in the vicinity of Mount Tarrengower.

"I ain't got much beauty," Day said, while we were admiring him, "'cos I trust to inside appearances. But don't I look lovely? as we use to say at a first class funeral, when we had gone to some expense to get up the body in pretty good style."

We assured the shepherd that his attractions were of the first order, and that we appreciated his exertions in our behalf, and with these few compliments we walked towards the bridge, the ghost leaving his long gun behind.

"Ghosts," he said, in explanation, "is supposed to do unheard-of things, but I doubt whether any regular one ever walked around the earth with a gun; and if we should encounter the bushrangers, I think I should have more influence unarmed, for to give the devils their due, they don't care a rush for the smell of gunpowder, while they is firm believers in spirits, 'cos there is a sort of a tradition that a proprietor of a sheep farm, who was murdered some years since, wanders round nights, and makes himself generally disagreeable. I don't put any faith in the stories, 'cos I don't believe that there ever was a ghost, excepting one like me got up for the occasion."

The remark did not meet the approval of Mr. Brown, who was disposed to argue the matter, but I cut the discussion short by recommending silence, for fear of a party of scouts overhearing our conversation, when not even the spectral appearance of the shepherd could have saved us from a speedy death.

"You are right," replied the ghost, with a grave shake of his horny head; "we can't be too cautious now, for we don't know who is near us."

By the time we reached the main land, the ghost whispered that he would lead the way, and strike terror into the hearts of all who dared to look upon him; and I think that he was as good as his word, for no

sooner did the horses get a glimpse of his white form than there was a desperate attempt at a stampede; had not our animals been securely fastened to palm trees by stout ropes we probably never should have seen or heard of them again.

"Keep back," cried Mr. Brown, who was endeavoring to restrain his gray horse from breaking away. "Don't come near the animals, or they will make more noise than a hundred bushrangers."

The shepherd obeyed the order with a chuckle of delight, looking upon the fright of the horses as the greatest compliment that could be paid him, on the ground that animals were far better judges of supernatural characters than men.

After we had tamed the brutes, we quickly gathered up our blankets and provisions, and then replaced the pack upon the horse and started towards the island. We were hastened somewhat in our movement by a sound which my experience told me was a signal much used by bushrangers when desirous of calling in or extending their scouts. I had heard it before, when first on my way to the mines from Melbourne, and I could not help, in spite of all the trials and difficulties that surrounded me, from recalling those days, and wondering how we escaped being cut off to a man by Black Darnley and his gang.

"Drive on the horses as fast as possible," whispered the shepherd.

"Them 'ere parrot crawings means, is the coast clear?"

I needed no urging, knowing as I did that the pretended squaking of parrots was produced by human beings, but hardly had the shepherd spoken, when away off to our left the cry was taken up.

"That's an answer," cried Day, listening attentively. "They report all right as yet."

By this time we had reached the bridge, and sought to urge our animals to cross, but they had some experience with the bogs of Australia, and stoutly refused to trust themselves on such a narrow strip of earth. We were almost in despair of saving the brutes, and to add to our anxiety, we could hear the bushrangers' signals from all parts of the forest, as the scouts gradually closed in to join the main body, who were, I doubted not, feasting on mutton, for the perfume of boiled meat greeted us, wafted towards the island by a light breeze which was hardly strong enough to dispel the clouds of mosquitoes hovering over us, ferocious for blood, and tantalizing enough to drive men frantic with agony.

"You won't get the horses to cross until you cover their eyes," the ghost said. "They have probably been mired some time or other, and know a bog as well as you. Don't waste precious time by fooling with the animals."

We thought the advice was good, and we adopted it without delay, by tying our pocket handkerchiefs over the eyes of the animals, and in this condition I led my horse over the bridge, followed by Mr. Brown with the packed animal. The ghost, having removed his head gear, held the gray while we were so employed.

We were obliged to proceed with great caution, for fear of a misstep on the part of the animals, but fortunately we reached the island without an accident, but as we did so we heard a shrill croak from beneath the very palms where we had encamped. The call was repeated

in a dozen different directions, and then all was quiet, and not the rustling of a leaf could be heard to show that a large body of men were all tending to one point to investigate the cause of the alarm, and study over the mysteries of our encampment.

We secured our animals in a small valley at the further end of the island, and then returned cautiously to the bridge for the purpose of relieving the ghost of his distress, but, to our surprise, Mr. Brown's gray horse and the supernatural gentleman were not to be seen.

"If the d——d humbug has not run off with my horse!" muttered my friend, indignant at his loss.

"I don't believe it," I replied; "he has probably retired to the shade of those palm trees, seeing that no chance presented itself for getting the animal to us."

"I hope so," Mr. Brown said, "but fear the fellow is a horse thief, and having accomplished his object, will never return to this locality."

I didn't think so, but there was no use attempting to convince Mr. Brown of his error, and while we were discussing the matter, we had the supreme dissatisfaction of seeing ten well-armed men *debouch* from the group of palm trees, and, with heads bent to the ground, follow the tracks of our horses towards the bridge.

"We are in a pretty condition for a siege," muttered my friend, as he thought of the bushrangers attempting to starve us into a surrender, knowing very well that they would never attack us in our almost invulnerable position.

"Be quiet, and let us watch their motions," I replied.

We were not so far from the main land but we could hear every word if spoken in an ordinary tone, for, as I said before, the night was unusually calm and quiet.

"D—n it, don't I know a horse's track from a bullock's?" we heard one of the bushrangers say, as though he was remonstrating with his companions. "I tell you here's the prints of three horses' feet, and I'll leave it to any native in Australia. I've taken lessons from 'em in my lifetime, I have."

If the fellow's story was correct, he could not have learned from a more patient race, for the Australians can track a man through a wilderness, and can see signs of footprints that a European would never discover. If a blade of grass is turned, the native stops and examines it, and can tell within a few hours the length of time that has expired since it was trodden on. If half a dozen grains of sand are displaced from the burning prairies, the native sets himself at work, and can tell what kind of an animal has passed that way, and whether fat or lean, alarmed or unconcerned. They can find their way through a wilderness, and resist hunger and thirst with marvellous fortitude; and while others sink under the influence of burning heat, the native Australian, with head bare, seems to court the rays of the sun, and moves along with a steady step, and without a word of complaint.

I no longer wondered at the assurance of the bushranger when he proclaimed himself a disciple of Australian barbarians.

"Will any man in his senses believe that the horses have crossed that narrow strip?" demanded one of the fellows, pointing to the

bridge; "I know the horses of this country too well to believe that they like bogs so well as to venture there."

"I tell you that two of the horses have crossed to that island!" cried the first speaker, after stooping down and examining the ground; "here, see for yourself!"

The robbers gathered around the spot indicated, and we could hear them converse in low tones for a few minutes, and look suspiciously towards the island, where we were hid from observation by a number of large rocks.

"If two of the horses has gone to the island, whar is the other?" cried a voice, more gruff and savage than the others.

No one seemed disposed to answer that question, and for a few seconds there was a profound silence.

"I tell you what it is, coveys, I don't care about staying in this neighborhood long, 'cos I heard a brother pal say once, that ever since old Buckerly was knocked on the head he has wandered round here with a sheet of flame in one hand, a spear in the other, and a pair of horns on his head, to show that he was in the cattle trade when finished."

There was a faint laugh at the suspicious man's story, but I noticed that their expressions of mirth were not overflowing.

"Pooh! you don't believe such d——d lies, do you?" one fellow asked.

"Never you mind what I believe," said the story teller, with a dogmatical emphasis.

"Well, we had better be doing something, or else return to the camp and get a bit to eat; I'm tired of tramping all day and getting no plunder," cried one, who didn't seem to be in a good humor.

"Hullo! one horse went off in this direction!" cried the fellow who was following up the trail.

The gang gathered round the speaker, and satisfied themselves that such was the case, and then we could see them gazing with some degree of apprehension upon the dark palms.

"Who's going there to make a search?" one asked.

"Not I," said one.

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"Fools, are you afraid of your own shadows?" demanded one robber, more bold than the others.

"I don't fear any man, if he comes at me single, but I don't like fighting with the devil and his imps!" exclaimed the superstitious bushranger, and I judged that a majority of his comrades sided with his idea, and seemed much more disposed to return to camp than to weary themselves with a search for unknown foes.

"You know what the cap'n will say if we go back without a good report. It's easier for us to work now, than to scout over the whole ground again," we heard the man who had followed the trail say.

"Yes, but why don't he take some work and do it?" demanded another, who was disposed to grumble at the order of things.

"You had better ask him," some one answered, dryly.

"Not I," was the response; "I value my head too dearly."

The others laughed, and for a few minutes held a whispered conver-

sation, the burden of which seemed to be that there was something concealed beneath the branches of the palm trees, and that it was advisable to make an examination as soon as possible, but no one was disposed to lead the way, for reasons — first, if an enemy, and well armed, he could easily kill two or three of his assailants before discovery, and second, the robbers were not sure but that there was truth in the story of their comrade concerning the ghost of Buckerly, and if there was, they did not care about an encounter with a spirit from the other world, who was proof against powder, steel, and lead.

While they were still discussing the question in tones so low that we could not hear all that passed, I thought how materially we could be aided by the shepherd, if he was so disposed.

I was almost fearful that Mr. Brown's suspicions were correct, and that he left us to take care of ourselves, while he made his escape on my friend's valuable horse, worth, at any station, about fifty pounds.

"Look," cried my companion, nudging me with his elbow; "the devils have made up their minds to run the risk, and search for the horse in the shadow of the palm trees."

As he spoke, I saw the gang move forward in a compact body, as though borrowing encouragement from each other, and one or two pretended to laugh, as if scorning all apprehensions, but I thought that the mirth did not come from their hearts.

When about midway between the trees and the bridge, I observed them halt suddenly, and while I was wondering for what, forth, from amid the leaves and branches of the palms, rode a figure that loomed up in the moonlight in colossal proportions.

For a moment I forgot that the shepherd was acting the part of a ghost, and I felt a little of the old symptoms return, but they were soon banished, and then I was prepared to enjoy the rich treat of seeing how other men acted when dealing with what was supposed to be a visitant from the other world.

For a moment not a sound escaped the group, as the tall figure of the shepherd, mounted on the gray horse, moved slowly and majestically towards them. Presently I heard one fellow utter a yell of terror, and break away from his companions, and run wildly towards the camp — then another followed, and then another, until the remaining ones turned, and, with shrieks and yells of horror, followed the first fugitive as rapidly as their legs could carry them.

A number of the most timid threw away their guns, and every thing that impeded flight, and although the ghost did not depart from his grave and dignified bearing, and solemn walk, yet in less than five minutes no one was in sight except the cause of the fright, our new friend, Day.

CHAPTER LXXI.

Sam Tyrell and the Ghost.

As soon as we saw the result of the shepherd's ruse, we crossed the bridge and joined him.

"Didn't I do that in good style?" he asked. "Did you ever hear of a ghost that was more successful than me?"

I complimented him by replying in the negative, and also assuring him that I considered he was at the height of his profession.

"You may well call it a trade," he exclaimed, removing his heavy headdress and wiping his moist brow, "for there ain't a man in the country who knows how to do such things in shape unless he has been in the funeral line, like me. Did you see 'em run?"

I assured him that the retreat of the bushrangers was so sudden that we could not help noticing the fact.

"I didn't believe that coveys could cut so; and they threw away their guns, too, that shows how skeert they was," continued Day, apparently so overjoyed at his success that he could talk of nothing else.

"But it will not do for us to stand here and talk when the bushrangers are liable to come back at any moment and surprise you holding communication with beings of this earth," I said. "Let us get under the shadow of the trees, where we can talk without danger."

My suggestion was agreed to, and in a few seconds we were on our old camping ground and debating what we should do next. I was in favor of an immediate retreat to the banks of the Loddon, which river I proposed to cross, and find refuge at Hawswood station, where we could remain for a few days, and then return for another examination of the earth for the treasure. Mr. Brown, whether fearful to trust to Day's honesty, or the bushrangers' superstitious feelings, did not coincide with me, and was for remaining until daylight at any rate, and during that time make further search for the gold, and if not found in that period, he proposed giving up the expedition altogether and returning to Ballarat.

The shepherd heard us discuss the merits of our several propositions without interruption, and while we were still uncertain what to do, — avarice bidding us to stay, and caution and prudence to fly, — he spoke, —

"I have no wish to advise you coveys in any course that ain't right, but if you will listen to me I'll get you out of this affair in safety, and with the money that is buried."

"How?" I asked.

"By still playing the ghost," he replied, with a grin.

"You have done so, and successfully," I said; "can't you think of some other dodge?"

"Don't want any other," he returned, patting the bullock's head in an affectionate manner. "Men can always be moved by their fears and guilty consciences."

We agreed with him in that respect, but didn't see how he could serve us further by assuming the ghost line.

"Then I'll tell you," the shepherd said. "One half of the coveys who saw me by this time think that they have been frightened by a shadow, a white bullock, or a horse. They won't acknowledge that they saw a ghost, while the other portion will contend stoutly that I had fire issuing from my mouth, and that I was the devil or his imp. With this question unsettled I shouldn't be surprised if they made these parts another visit to solve their doubts, for the bushrangers who haven't seen me will only deride those who have, and disbelieve all the statements made."

We acknowledged that there was some truth in the remark, and Day, highly delighted with the admission, continued:

"Now I think that the best way would be for me to show myself once more and give the coveys another and a greater fright. I can steal up to their camping ground, and while they are quarrelling, walk into their midst without waiting for the formalities of an introduction."

"But you may lose your life in making the experiment," I said.

"There's no fear of that — who ever heard of a man firing with a steady hand while in the presence of a ghost?"

I reminded him that I had tried the experiment, and that if the ball had struck a few inches lower down he would never have played the ghost a second time.

"That just proves what I said. Can't you hit a man at two rods' distance, and place the ball just where you like?"

I flattered myself that I was a good pistol shot, and could do so under ordinary circumstances.

"Yet your hand must have shook, or I should have been hit."

There was no denying the truth of that assertion, for I remembered the circumstance perfectly well.

"If I don't frighten them coveys so that they will avoid this place hereafter, then I don't know much about ghosts, and how they act," Day continued.

We tried to urge the fellow to be content with the triumph which he had already accomplished, but he was mad for another exhibition of his powers, and all that we could say had no effect. Go he would, and at length we determined to accompany him for the purpose of rendering assistance in case he wanted it, or to see how the bushrangers would bear themselves upon a second exhibition.

The shepherd was so well acquainted with the country that he guided us by a short route towards the camping ground, stealing along between the bushes and trees so quietly and rapidly that, with all my knowledge of woodcraft, I had difficulty in following him and keeping close to his heels. At length we saw the reflection of a camp fire, and then we grew more cautious in our movements, frequently stopping for a few minutes to listen if we could hear other sounds besides our footsteps. But we encountered no one, for the bushrangers had apparently fallen back upon the main body, convinced that the coast was clear of all earthly intruders. The shepherd stopped when he thought that we were within sound of the camp, and beckoned us to his side.

"There's no use in you coveys getting your necks in halters follering

close arter me, 'cos 'tain't any use. We ain't going to fight the fellers, but to frighten 'em. You jist keep a little back and watch me, and if any thing happens, why, don't stop to see how it terminates. Get off the best way that you can."

"That would be ungenerous," I replied. "You are now risking your life to serve us, and we should not desert you to save ourselves."

"Don't you be afeard of me," the shepherd said, quite coolly. "I can take care of myself, and if the bushrangers finds out the cheat I can explain it to 'em some way or other that will satisfy 'em. Is it all right?"

We assured him that we would be governed by his wishes, and with this declaration he led the way towards the camp, first taking the precaution of putting on his head gear, in case he should meet with stragglers. We followed in his footsteps at some distance until we reached the edge of the woods, when the ghost motioned for us to take up a position in a clump of bushes, while he skulked behind a tree.

We stole carefully forward and saw that we were within five rods of the bushrangers, who were seated around half a dozen fires, cooking their mutton on long sticks, and endeavoring to obtain a cessation of hostilities from the attacks of mosquitoes by beating the air wildly with their huge black fists when not engaged in cutting meat, or throwing on light brush to feed the fires. The men all seemed excited, and we listened to their conversation with some pleasure, showing, as it did, how mistaken they were in their estimate of the true appearance of the ghost.

"For ten years I've knocked about these woods, and done some very pretty tricks, but I never met with such a looking devil as I've seen to-night," I heard an old grizzly fellow (an exact representative of a pirate) say, as he ripped off about a pound of flesh from the carcass of a lamb, thrust it upon a stick and held it over the coals, after which he looked around upon his brother devils with an air that showed how much he should like to kill every one present merely for the fun of the thing.

"I would have stopped and spoken to the darn thing if any one had kept me company," a young fellow said, apparently desirous of raising himself in the estimation of his companions; but, if such was his intention, it was a failure, for the old pirate turned on him like a hungry wolf with snapping jaws.

"You stop and bandy words with a spirit?" asked the old fellow, with a sneer. "Why, d—n it, you was the first one to run."

"Not as you knows of," replied the young robber, shaking his head as though he was willing to test the matter.

"Do you tell me I lie, you impudent son of a Dutch woman?" asked old grizzly, lifting his stick from the fire and striking the youngster full upon his face with the hot meat, which caused him to start from the ground as though about to inflict vengeance upon the old pirate for the insult.

The elder bushranger did not seem in the least disturbed. He shook the mutton clear of his stick as though it had been contaminated by contact with his companion's flesh, and then drew his long, sharp knife, and began to cut off another portion from the carcass by his side.

For a few seconds the insulted youngster seemed uncertain what to do. Then I saw his right hand seek for his knife, draw it, and with a wild cry he threw himself upon the old man. The other bushrangers merely glanced towards the parties, but did not offer to interfere. There was but a slight struggle, for the attack was so sudden that the grizzly fellow did not take the precaution of defending himself, trusting, probably, to his age and influence with the gang to exempt him from a personal combat.

I heard a low groan, and then the attacking party arose and returned to his former place, while the head of the old robber fell forward and touched the fire, and there it remained for a few minutes, until the stench of burning hair became so great that some one shouted out to remove the body, and not let it lay there and spoil their appetites.

One man, more humane than the rest, lifted the dead pirate up and carried him a short distance, and then laid him carefully under a tree. The whole transaction, including the death, did not take ten minutes, and a number of the gang did not even stop from picking bones during its occurrence.

"You settled him, Billy?" cried a fellow at a distant camp fire, slightly raising his voice.

"I should think that I did," answered the young ruffian, wiping his knife on his shirt sleeve, and then finishing his supper, with an evident attempt to appear unconcerned, although I could see that he was all of a tremble, and that he glared around the clear space as though he feared to encounter a disagreeable sight every moment.

"Let this be a lesson to all of us," cried a deep, bass voice, which I heard for the first time. "How often have I told you that I desired harmony in the gang, and that if a man gave the lie he was responsible for it with his life. Why can't you live like gentlemen, and not like a set of d——d blackguards. Because you are robbers and cutthroats is no reason why you should murder each other. The world is large enough and contains enough of our enemies without looking for them in the gang."

There was not a word of response to these remarks, but I noticed that many of the gang hung their heads as though they did not wish to meet the eyes of the speaker, who seemed to be a person in authority.

"That must be Sam Tyrell, who is called the gentlemanly bushranger of Australia," whispered Mr. Brown, who was anxious to get sight of a man who had performed some very daring exploits, and some excessive acts of cruelty, while commanding a gang of ruffians on the road between Ballarat and Melbourne.

"Hush," I whispered, "or you will betray your hiding-place;" for Mr. Brown, in his eagerness, moved the bushes in a manner that attracted attention.

I had heard of Sam, through his many exploits, and was anxious to get sight of him, so that in case we ever met I should recognize his face.

It is related of him, by the old settlers of Australia, that he once returned to Melbourne, dressed himself in black with scrupulous neatness, and then boldly presented himself at the door of the lieutenant-governor's palace, passed in by means of a ticket which he had taken

from a man whom he met on the highway, danced with the first ladies of the city, was introduced to the governor's wife, and would have danced with her had etiquette permitted it. In fact, Tyrell created considerable of a sensation, and ate his host's ices, and drank his wine, with a degree of nonchalance that charmed the ladies and disgusted the gentlemen.

Had Sam conducted himself with a certain degree of circumspection no suspicions would have been excited by his conduct; but the devil prompted him to make love to a pretty woman who was present in company with her husband, the latter an old man, ugly as sin, and jealous as Othello.

Sam saw the lady admired his vigorous-looking form, and he addressed her a few remarks of flattery, without waiting for the formalities of an introduction. Her husband fired up at the sight, and growled forth his displeasure in no measured terms.

Sam paid no more attention to his looks and hard words than if he had been a child. The contempt, so quietly conveyed, only enraged the old gentleman the more, and the matter began to be talked about. First one and then another inquired who the good-looking gentleman dressed in black was, but no one could answer the question. The governor was appealed to, but he was as ignorant as his guests. At length an aide-de-camp was intrusted with the delicate duty of requesting the stranger to disclose his address.

The officer touched Tyrell on the shoulder, while he was standing by the fascinating little Mrs. P——, and desired a word with him in private. Sam bowed low to the object of his affections, and followed the officer to an ante-chamber. The guests, who were hovering around the door, waited impatiently for the officer to make his reappearance and report.

Ten minutes passed away, and still the officer was invisible. Half an hour glided by, and then the crowd ventured to knock, but there was no answer. The door was tried, and found to be locked.

His excellency was consulted, and he sent for an armorer of the regiment stationed in Melbourne, a man very skilful in picking and repairing locks. The soldier exerted his skill, but in vain; the door refused to open, and then, grown desperate, the governor ordered an axe brought, and a few vigorous blows drove the door from its hinges, and a crowd rushed in.

There was no light in the apartment, and Mr. P——, the jealous husband, was so eager that he stumbled over some object lying on the floor, and pitched headlong against the wall, bruising his bald head, and causing him to curse, with all an Englishman's spleen, at his mishap, while he did not forget to allude to his wife in his prayers as the cause of his misfortune.

A light was brought as speedily as possible, and, to the consternation of those present, the aide-de-camp was found extended upon the floor, his arms tied behind his back, his mouth gagged with a pocket handkerchief, and on his breast was pinned a piece of paper addressed to the governor.

It was but the work of a moment to relieve the officer from his unpleasant position, and the instant he could speak he rushed for the

window, which was observed to be open, and hailed the sentry, who was pacing back and forth a short distance beneath.

The guard answered promptly, but declared that no one had passed him that evening, and that if a man had attempted to escape by the window he should have seen him.

By this time his excellency had read the note, and was raving for the captain of the police force, and vowing that it was dangerous to live in his own palace, the bushrangers had become so audacious.

The word bushranger struck terror into the hearts of all present, and even the jealous husband modulated his wrath, and rubbed his head with some degree of contentment.

There was considerable curiosity to learn the contents of the note, but etiquette required that the governor should not be asked regarding it, although every gentleman present was bursting to know, and all the ladies were unanimously of the opinion that the adventure was romantic, and actually looked upon Mrs. P——, who was half frightened to death, with some degree of envy, because she was a prominent actor in the scene.

At length his excellency condescended to enlighted his audience, and read the paper which he held in his hand, although he boiled with rage as he did so. The note was as follows: —

"MOST WORTHY GOVERNOR. — For the very kind manner in which you have entertained me this evening, please accept my thanks. I have drank your wine, eaten your ices, and enjoyed your refreshments as well as any gentleman present, and had I remained long enough I would have added to my exploits by kissing your lady friends, including your wife. As I did not, please perform the ceremony for me. The next time that I visit you I hope you will have a quantity of ice to cool the wine, as I am accustomed to such luxuries, and champagne tastes insipid without it. I think that your excellency should change your wine merchant, for some of the liquor that I tasted to-night never saw France, and I hope never will, for that polite nation would feel eternally disgraced at the thought of concocting such beverages. Hoping that I shall, at no distant day, meet your excellency in the bush, where I can return a few of the civilities which I have received this evening, and, I trust, relieve you of a portion of your worldly cares, in the shape of wealth, allow me to humbly subscribe myself, your friend and well-wisher,

"SAM TYRELL, *Bushranger.*"

"The impudent scoundrel!" was the general exclamation, and I think that the reader will agree with the guests, and pronounce the bushranger a bold man, and one of considerable address and nerve.

Of course, the mounted police were set in motion, and the country scoured for miles in extent, but no signs of Sam were discovered; and the mortification of my friend Murden may be better imagined than described when he was afterwards informed that Sam did not even take the trouble of leaving the city that night, but changed his clothes, and passed a large portion of his time with a lady who was somewhat noted for liberality towards the male sex; and when he was tired of a metropolitan residence, he dressed himself in female attire, and with a

veil to conceal his face, passed soldiers and police, and rejoined his gang, who were fifty miles from Melbourne.

The story of the aide-de-camp was a curious one. He said that the stranger requested time to pencil a note to a distinguished gentleman in town, who was to vouch for his respectability; that after he had finished writing and directing it, Sam approached him, as though to request permission to send it by a bearer, but before he was aware of his intentions Tyrell had garroted him in such a manner that all resistance was impossible, and when about half dead, he was laid upon the floor, bound with cords, and then had a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, threats being made at the same time that death was certain if the least alarm was given.

The bushranger then waited until the guard turned his back, when he dropped from the window like a cat, and made his escape. The officer was laughed at so outrageously, that he sold his commission and left the army.

Such was one of the exploits of the "gentlemanly" bushranger whose actions we were watching, and over whose head a reward of five hundred pounds was hanging.

"If you must call each other liars, and rush to a fight, why don't you do so in a gentlemanly manner, at ten paces distant, and not shoot or cut each other down like dogs? Can I never learn you manners, and be d——d to you."

The speaker, of whom Mr. Brown had whispered, was Tyrell — he walked towards the young fellow, who had, but a moment before, killed the old pirate, and stopped in front of him. From our place of concealment we could admire the athletic form of the leader of the gang, and as the flames from the camp-fire blazed up and showed us his features, we could not help being struck with their stern beauty.

"Well, captin, he began it," cried the young assassin, in a snivelling, apologetic sort of tone; "I didn't want to hurt him, sure, if he hadn't told me I lied. I don't take that from nobody, you knows."

"You lie, you dog, you know you do," cried 'gentleman Sam,' in a tone expressive of profound contempt. "You stabbed old Bill when his back was turned, and did not give him a fair chance. I'll have no more such doings. A stop must be put to such kind of work. Do you all understand me?"

"I'm willing to abide by the regulations," the murderer said, with alacrity.

"I intend that you shall, for I am about to constitute myself a judge and jury, and punish you for shedding blood, as I think it should be punished. Stand up."

The fellow staggered to his feet, and we could see him glance with apprehension upon his leader, and then turn towards his comrades an appealing look, as though desirous of their support during his trying ordeal.

"You killed old Bill without a moment's warning for telling the truth, for I have been told by others that you was one of the first to run, and yet you saw nothing but a shadow, at which you was frightened. You deserve death, and at my hands you shall receive it."

"For God's sake don't kill me, cap'en!" shrieked the young fellow,

in an agony of terror, throwing himself upon his knees, and begging for mercy; "I have served you long and faithfully, and robbed as many miners as any man in the gang."

"That certainly should entitle him to mercy," whispered Mr. Brown, giving me a nudge with his elbow, as though I was asleep.

The leader of the bushrangers did not make any reply, but coolly drew a pistol from his belt.

"The cold-blooded scoundrel intends to murder the man!" Mr. Brown said, trembling with excitement and indignation; "why don't the brutes interfere, and save the life of their comrade?"

"Take notice, men," said the robber chief, addressing his gang, "that I am about to punish a man for committing a murder, and that hereafter, if you must quarrel, refer the matter to me for settlement, and if I do not satisfy you with my decision, then you can appeal to the knife or pistol, as can be agreed upon. Have you any reason why sentence should not be executed upon this man?"

There was no response. The villains would not even raise their voices to save a comrade's life.

"I should imagine the fellow was the Lord High Chancellor of England to hear him talk," muttered Mr. Brown; "lend me your revolver, and the instant the ruffian fires I will give him a shot if it costs me my life."

"And it would cost not only your life, but mine, and that I am not disposed to relinquish yet. Be patient, for we can do nothing to save the poor devil," I replied.

The man whose doom had been pronounced, a second time threw himself upon the ground, and crawled to the feet of the leader in humble supplication for mercy. He shed tears, and vowed that if his life was spared, he would steal with renewed energy, and be more faithful than ever; and for a while I thought the chief would relent, but during a moment's pause, I distinctly heard the click of a pistol lock, and saw Tyrell's arm raised as though taking aim.

I shut my eyes to hide the dreadful sight, and expected to hear the report of the weapon and the groans of the victim, but while I was speculating on the length of time that the poor devil was kept in suspense, I received a tremendous nudge from Mr. Brown's elbow, accompanied by the exclamation of—

"The devil has come at last!"

I opened my eyes, and was gratified to see that the ghost whose disappearance I had noticed, re-appeared upon the scene, but with one important change in his aspect, which rendered his *tout ensemble* more hideous than ever.

By some means he had managed to light a fire upon his bony head, and the flames were twisting and squirming like so many fiery serpents, revealing the long bullock's horns with telling effect. So well had he managed the affair, that, accustomed as I was to his presence, I had half a mind to run, not knowing but a real devil, or being of the other world, had usurped Day's especial functions in the ghost line.

If the sudden appearance was startling to myself and Mr. Brown, how much more must it have astonished the bushrangers, who were anxiously awaiting the death of their companion at the hands of Tyr-

ell. I saw the arm of the latter fall as if paralyzed, and he started back, but disdained to fly upon the first alarm. Not so with his comrades. With one accord they dropped knives, meat, and blankets, and with shouts of frantic terror rushed towards the woods, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to escape, and looking over their shoulders as they fled, as if they feared that Satan had already laid a hand upon them, and was about to claim them as his own.

Even the young fellow who had murdered the old pirate, seemed to entertain some hope of escape from earthly enemies, for he commenced crawling away from the fires as fast as he could on hands and knees, and bent his course directly towards our ambush. Once or twice I saw him look back, apparently with the expectation of receiving a shot in his rear, but finding that his captain was too much occupied with his own matters, he seemed to think that Providence had interfered in a most wonderful manner in his behalf, and recommenced crawling with renewed energy and hope, not caring half as much for the ghost as he did for the vengeance of his chief.

"Here comes this fellow directly on to us," whispered Mr. Brown; "what can we do to start him in another direction?"

"Groan him away," I replied, recollecting the efficacy of diabolical sounds in my own case; and forthwith we uttered in chorus the most hideous noises possible for human beings to produce. So frightful were they that even Tyrell, who had made his boast of being able to endure all things, gradually retreated as he saw the ghost advance towards him with the flaming headdress, and at length, after giving one quick glance around, and finding that he was deserted by his crew, fairly turned, and bounded into the brush and disappeared from sight.

We listened attentively, and could hear the bushrangers making their way through the woods in hot haste; but fearing the shrewdness of Sam, we kept perfectly quiet, until we were certain that gentleman had really left his quarters, and was not lurking in the vicinity to see what sort of a ghost had frightened him.

"A splendid performance," I said, as Mr. Brown and myself stepped from our ambush, and congratulated the shepherd, who, much as he liked to be praised, didn't think it worth while to listen in so conspicuous a place.

"Follow me as fast as possible," he exclaimed, removing his still smoking headdress, and exhibiting a face blackened and singed by the flames. "We ain't safe here even for a minute, for the devils will come back after their traps, and if they should get hold of us we would be real ghosts in less than an hour."

I had the same impression, and therefore followed our guide through the woods in a directly opposite course from that which the bushrangers took, and in a few minutes we had the satisfaction of gaining our island and finding our horses as we had left them.

"Now that we are beyond the reach of the robbers, tell me how you prepared your fiery headdress?" Mr. Brown asked, turning to the shepherd, who was rubbing his burnt face and singed hair and whiskers.

"The fact is," replied Day, "the flames are a new sort of 'speriment, and I've hardly got use to 'em. I think that I should do better next time. I have every reason to think so, and if I don't, I shall be forced

to give up that portion of the show, although I should think that it was very effective, if I may judge from the remarkable antics of the coveys. That black-whiskered scoundrel wanted to have a shot at me, and I guess that he would hadn't it been for the fire. The flames are a great improvement, 'cos they make me look jist as though I had arrived from kingdom come."

"But how was the effect produced?" demanded Mr. Brown.

"Well, I don't know as I had ought to tell you coveys, 'cos you might claim the 'vention as your own," replied the shepherd, coquettishly; but finding that we were ready to vouch for our disinterestedness, he continued: "You see when I was overhauling your traps last night ——"

Here Mr. Brown groaned, as he thought of the liquor which had been carried off, and how acceptable it would be at the present time.

"I found a lot of matches, so I took half that you had," continued Day, "which I consider an honest transaction, 'cos I know coveys who would have carried all off and not thanked ye. I've got some honor, if I am a shepherd."

"Especially when you drank all my brandy," Mr. Brown remarked.

Day scorned to notice the insinuation, but continued:

"I thought how convenient them 'ere matches would be, and I didn't scruple to take 'em, 'cos I knew that if we were acquainted you would divide, and be glad to accommodate me."

We didn't tell Day the maledictions we had showered upon his head, or how we should have treated him had we caught him with our pack. We thought that as he had been of service to us we would withhold our expressions of dissatisfaction. Day continued:

"I had the matches in my pocket when I seed that black devil get ready to kill his man, and a thought struck me that if the bushranger was 'gentleman Sam,' I'd better look out how I played pranks with him, 'cos he's as bold as a lion, and nearly about as strong. I thought that if I was to frighten him I'd got to put on the extras, and I jist collected a few dried twigs, lashed them on the head with dried kangaroo sinews, tougher than an undertaker's heart, and when I found that it was about time for the coffin, I jist lighted the wood works with a match, and there I was all shining bright like an angel."

"If you resemble an angel, I don't wonder at the few visits they pay the earth," grumbled Mr. Brown, who, now that the danger was nearly past, was disposed to quiz the man who had been so serviceable to us.

"Well, I 'spose there is some difference 'twixt us," returned Day, "for if all angels got burned as bad as I have been they would leave out the fire when they went visiting."

"Well, well," replied my companion, consolingly, "you have been an angel to us, Day, and if I had only a portion of the good liquor which you carried off last night I would drink your health and bathe your wounds."

"Would you, though?" demanded Day, with animation.

Mr. Brown reiterated his statement, although in a languid manner, for he did not exactly approve of the midnight depredation which our friend had been guilty of.

"Well, to tell the truth," continued Day, "I didn't drink all that I found, 'cos I thought it would be cruel, so I jist changed it into a blad-

der that I carried water in, and I have got it owed away here somewhere."

Never did a confession sound more welcome, and we watched our friend eagerly until he returned from the place where the liquor was hid, and we found about a pint of the raw material saved from his rapacious stomach.

"Here is health and long life to all undertakers' apprentices," Mr. Brown said, pressing the bladder to his mouth in the most affectionate manner.

The words were hardly uttered when we heard the shrill calls of the bushrangers, as they rallied after their flight, and were returning to their encampment to recover what articles they had left behind them. Surprised to think that they should have ventured upon haunted ground the second time, I glanced towards the woods, and found, to my surprise, that daylight had stolen upon us almost unperceived, and that the bushrangers had gained fresh courage from the fact, and were still in a condition to annoy us.

CHAPTER LXXII.

Finding the Buried Treasure.

If we had once given the matter a thought, we might have known that the bushrangers would return to their camp by break of day, for the purpose of securing their effects which they had left behind, and to talk over the matter of the spiritual apparition. I almost regretted that we had not, during their absence, endeavored to gain some secure retreat, either at the station on our right, which our Day belonged to, and where it was thought the bushrangers would not have dared to follow us, or else having struck out boldly for Mount Tarrengower, endeavored to have discovered a path or trail that led over the mountain, where we might have found safety. In case no trail existed, we could have secreted ourselves in one of the dark glens on the side of the Mount, and remained there until Day had brought us word that the coast was clear.

Even Mr. Brown and the ghost began to look black when the peculiar calls, which we knew were signals employed by the bushrangers, saluted us. Daylight was already upon us, and the occupation of our apparition was at an end, for however horrid he might look during darkness, the light of the sun revealed his true character, and stripped him of his ghastly look.

As it was impossible for us to venture from the island while the robbers infested the woods, we naturally turned to each other for advice and counsel. Mr. Brown considered that our only chance for safety was to remain where we were, and wait patiently until Sam and his gang were disposed to vacate the woods, and he argued shrewdly that they

would not pass a second night in a locality that had been the scene of a cold-blooded murder, and the appearance of a ghost of the most frightful description.

The shepherd was in favor of the same plan, and expressed himself ready to fight like a Briton in case we were attacked, and to show his sincerity, revealed to us the state of his powder horn, half full of diamond glazed, while his pouch contained nearly thirty bullets, each weighing an ounce.

Luckily we had taken the precaution to remove Mr. Brown's gray horse from the main land to the island, so that no trace of our presence remained, excepting the footprints of the animals.

"I think," said Day, after a moment's hesitation, "that I can venture to meet the coveys and have a talk with 'em, and endeavor to allay their suspicions if they have any."

Of course Mr. Brown and myself remonstrated against such a measure, as we considered that his life would not be worth one of his sheepskins if met by the gang.

"I don't know 'bout that," Day replied. "The coveys ain't so fond of killing stockmen, if they don't meddle too much with their mutton, and I'm sure whenever gentlemanly Sam and his boys have honored me with a visit, I have let 'em have their own way, and they have killed without hinderance. If that isn't treating 'em well, then I was not larnt manners."

"There is some force in what you say," Mr. Brown replied.

"Of course there is. Can't I go to the coveys and pretend that I am searching for stray sheep, and tell a lie or two about the horses, and then hint that I don't like to be caught in this part of the country after dark, 'cos I have seen strange sights, that I don't like to talk about? I don't know how we are to manage, unless I act the part proposed, for as sure as you are alive, the coveys will feel curious enough to know what has been going on in the island, and if they once get a hint that we are here, it is all day with us."

"We could defend the island against ten times the number of bushrangers that belong to the gang," muttered Mr. Brown.

"No doubt of that," remarked the shepherd, dryly; "but the coveys ain't going to make a fight of it by any means. They would starve us out in less than twenty-four hours after beginning the siege."

Mr. Brown pointed to the horses, as though intimating we could eat them if pressed, — but Day shook his head.

"'Tain't the grub that we should need as much as something else. Give me a well of water and the horses, and I'll agree to hold this island agin all the bushrangers in the country. Don't you know that when the sun begins to scorch a covey's head he must have water in his stomach, or he'll soon kick the bucket? We could eat the animals, but we must have something to drink likewise, or else we'd have fits, and like as not kill each other. No, no, we can't stand a siege and hope to escape, and I think what I have proposed is the very best plan."

We hardly knew what reply to make our acquaintance, who seemed determined to run his head into the lion's den, but the thought suddenly struck Mr. Brown that if the shepherd meant to thus expose his life he deserved to get large pay for it, and as my friend was one of those kind

of men who liked to have every thing understood, he considered that it was his duty to touch on that particular point, and find out what his views really were.

"We could afford to pay something for the risk that's run, in case you undertook the task, but we are not rich by any means, although you may think so by our appearance," my friend said, with a complaisant glance at his person, which he imagined was dignified, forgetful that he had dismissed the uniform of an inspector, and wore nothing but a flannel shirt and duck trousers.

"Humph," muttered the ghost. "I should almost be ashamed to change places with either of you. As for reward, first wait till I ask for one. I will promise not to claim any thing more expensive than a bottle of brandy, and a few pipes of 'bacca, and those I shan't ask for unless you come this way agin, which isn't likely."

"If we don't come we can send," cried Mr. Brown, eagerly, "and I promise that you shall have a gallon of as good brandy, and half a dozen pounds as good tobacco as can be found in Ballarat, if you can get those d——d bushrangers clear of this part of the country so that we can escape. There they go again, with their eternal *co-hoo-pe*. What in the devil's name do they mean by that, I wonder?"

"It is the signal for them to extend, and keep a sharp lookout," I replied, recollecting the signal perfectly well, having heard it many times.

"Then I have no time to waste, as the funeral undertaker said, when told that the body in the house would come to life if left unburied," cried the ghost, beginning to strip off his sheepskins with nervous haste. "I'm to have the liquor and 'bacca, mind."

I joined Mr. Brown in assuring him that we would freely keep our word; and after Day had drained the last drop of liquor that we had with us, he boldly started on his dangerous undertaking, and we watched his form as he walked over the peninsula, and reached the main land, with more than ordinary interest.

Suddenly he stopped, before reaching the woods, and applying his hands to his mouth, he uttered a word that is well known to stockmen of Australia.

"Co-hee," he shouted, and it seemed as though the sound could be heard for miles, so sharp and shrill was it.

In an instant the various cries which the bushrangers had uttered were hushed, and the robbers seemed surprised at the sudden call, which they knew did not belong to their party.

Once more the shepherd placed his hands to his mouth, and gave the shrill cry of—

"Co-hee."

I never heard a yell that sounded so distinct, and which seemed to travel such a distance. I venture to say, that if a person had been upon the summit of Mount Tarrengower, he could have recognized the call, and had he answered, we should have heard it.

Day, apparently satisfied with what he had done, rested upon his honors, and waited for the finale of his adventures, and he was not long kept in suspense, for the bushrangers, after a brief reconnoitre from behind trees and bushes, suddenly debouched into the open plain, and

advanced towards the seemingly unconscious shepherd at a rapid rate, and foremost in the group, I recognized the dark features of Sam Tyrell, the leader.

"Who are you, that answers our calls like a man lost on the plains?" demanded Sam, throwing his gun into the hollow of his arm, as though he meant mischief if provoked.

"That's a pretty question for you coveys to ask, after eating my mutton as long as you have," replied Day. "I'm a shepherd, and belong to this station, and am now looking after my pet ram that got away from the flock some time during the night, and I'm afeard he's missed. You coveys ain't seen him, have you?"

The leader shook his head in a negative manner, and seemed to entertain no suspicion in regard to Day's doings the night before.

"I want to find the ram, 'cos he's a valuable one, and cost the owner of the stock considerable money, but I'll be blamed if I stay round here long, ram or no ram."

"Suppose we refuse to let you leave us?" asked Sam, rather gruffly.

"I don't care about leaving, as long as you stay," replied Day, with perfect assurance, and here he looked over his shoulder, as though he feared to see something at his elbow that would prove disagreable, "but I don't visit this spot often, and when I do come, 'tain't in the night time, you had better believe."

This confession seemed to awaken an interest in the bushrangers, for they crowded round Day as though desirous of an explanation; and from the point of our observation, carefully concealed by rank grass and rough rocks, we could observe the gang whisper to each other, and look at the shepherd, as though he could give an explanation if he was disposed to.

"What do you mean by your hints and frightened looks?" demanded the leader, in a tone that was intended to act as a warning, in case Day should attempt to deceive.

"O, what is the bloody use of my telling you coveys any thing?" the shepherd answered. "You fellers who don't care for the devil, wouldn't believe me, and I should only get laughed at. Have you seen my ram?"

"Blast your ram," cried Sam, with an impatient air. "We want to know what you mean by saying that you have seen strange sights?"

"Did I say that I had?" inquired Day, casting a rapid glance towards the woods, as though he feared the appearance of a horrid spectre.

"We are not to be trifled with, shepherd," and as the leader spoke, he made a motion with his gun that was very significant, and Day understood it, although he manifested no signs of disquietude.

"Is it possible," our friend asked, "that you have never heard of the Hunter of Mount Tarrengower? A huge spectre that rides on a white horse sometimes, and who threatens with death all who invade his sacred retreats. I have never seen the ghost, but one of my brother stockmen has, and he told me that he would not look upon the like again for the station, stock and all."

"Why does he frequent this spot in preference to others?" demanded the leader of the gang, who seemed to be interested in the story in spite of his assumed indifference.

"O, an old stockman once told me that a shepherd was roasted near these diggings by a gang of bushrangers, who wanted him to give up some money that he had. The covey was stuffy, and refused, or else he hadn't got any, I don't know which is the right story, but this I am positive of, I'd sooner give up all I was worth than be burned at the stake."

"Perhaps the reason is, you are worth nothing," suggested Sam, after a brief survey of the speaker.

"You have hit the nail of the coffin on its head this time," chuckled Day. "I don't see a sovereign from one year's end to t'other, and don't 'spect to till my time has expired, so that I can work for myself."

"You are a ticket of leave man, then?" demanded Sam, with more feeling than he had shown during the interview.

"Well, if I wasn't I shouldn't be here, working for thirty pounds a year, when there's gold to be dug for the mere paying of a license. No, no, just wait till I can call myself my own master, and then the sheep and stock may go to the devil, for all that I care."

"Can't you tell us something more about the ghost?" asked one of the men, who seemed to take an especial interest in Day's narrative.

"Well, I don't like to talk about the matter, 'cos 'tis said that the old feller visits those who are too intimate with his name. My comrade, who is at the other end of the station, told me once that he saw the Hunter when he was all in a blaze, and that when he spoke the ghost and flames disappeared. I don't believe half what he tells me though, 'cos I 'spose he tries to frighten me, but I've got as much courage as he has, any day."

There was a breathless silence for a few moments, and the robbers seemed to be digesting the story which they had listened to. We could see them whispering together, and apparently were disposed to believe what the shepherd had said.

"Here are the prints of horses feet," Sam exclaimed, pointing to the ground. "Have you seen horsemen in this vicinity lately?"

"Heaven forbid," cried Day. "The only horse that visits these parts is rode by the Hunter."

"Then we will give him fire to light him on his way," exclaimed Sam, with a forced laugh, and calling his men he turned and walked towards his late encampment, and was soon lost to view.

His gang followed close at his heels, and we were not sorry to see them depart, although we could not help wondering what was meant by the threat of finding fire for the supposed ghost. We found out, however, full soon, and owed the scamp a bitter grudge for his work.

The shepherd pretended to walk rapidly in the direction of the stockhouse, but concealed himself amid the trees, and waited until he thought the last robber had retired from sight, when he again joined us, and received our hearty congratulations for his good conduct.

"Now, then, let us have another search for the treasure," cried Mr. Brown, springing into the hole which Day had excavated, after he had frightened us from the island.

"And you can't be too quick about the work, neither," muttered the shepherd.

I asked for a meaning to his expression, but he declined answering, and seizing the pick began to tear up the sods with lusty strokes, but

before a dozen blows were struck, I heard the point of his pick strike something that gave forth a metallic sound.

"Hold on, Day," I cried, "the prize is within our grasp at last."

I carefully removed the dirt with my hands, and had the satisfaction of bringing to light a canvas bag that was so decayed that it barely supported the heavy weight which it contained.

Mr. Brown and the shepherd were almost frantic with delight, and would have cheered lustily, had not fear of bringing the bushrangers upon us again restrained them.

"Down with it, so that I can say I have seen some money in my lifetime!" cried Day. "Empty it out, and let me feel of it; let me but touch the precious yellow boys with my fingers, and wonder how many splendid funerals it would pay for."

I took one of his sheepskins and poured the contents of the bag upon it, and out rattled gold dust, sovereigns, doubloons, a number of American gold pieces — all bearing the date of 1832 — articles of jewelry, such as finger rings and watch chains, and at the bottom of the bag was a lady's gold watch, enamelled back, and half a dozen small diamonds set in the form of a cross upon the case. I examined the watch carefully, and saw a stain near the diamonds. Something told me that the mark was the blood of the unfortunate owner. I laid the jewel down with a shudder, and thought of the cruelties to which the owner had undoubtedly been subject before she met her death. Day, however, partook of none of my feelings, for he was eager to possess so attractive a trinket.

"Take it if you desire it," I said, handing the watch to the shepherd, "but you will always recollect that there is a stain of blood upon the case."

"Not I," he replied, handling the article with as much pride and pleasure as a boy receives a new toy; "I didn't shed her blood, and so shan't trouble myself about this little spot that is on the case. It's as pretty as a mahogany coffin, but it don't go."

"The works are rusted, and it will be necessary to send it to Melbourne for repairs."

"Not I," answered the ghost, with a chuckle; "somebody might see it and lay claim to it, and then where would be my watch, and where would I be? Another term at the hulks is not agreeable to think of, and my accounts of the manner in which I got hold of the thing wouldn't be believed. No, no; I'll wear it out of sight until I leave the country, or am rich enough to escape suspicion."

I thought that Day's course was the best, if he desired to retain possession of the property, for, as he said, a number of awkward questions would probably have been asked him at Melbourne, the mere carrying of a watch by a ticket of leave man being looked upon as suspicious by people who were not so honest as Day.

We continued our examination of the treasure, and were delighted to find that it exceeded our expectations, and so engrossed were we in speculating upon the nature of the dust that we forgot the hardships attendant upon obtaining it.

We counted the coins, and found that we had about three thousand dollars, and I judged the dust was worth about as much more, as it was of good quality, and entirely free of dirt.

"Now, Day, how much shall we give you for your valuable services?" asked Mr. Brown.

"O, I am satisfied with this," he answered, holding up his watch, which he was polishing on his shirt sleeve.

"But, of course, you expect a portion of the dust and gold coins?"

"No, I don't expect any thing, 'cos I volunteered my services, and I'm always happy to accommodate, as the man said who was willing to be put in a coffin before he was dead. Never mind me, I'm satisfied."

The shepherd's modesty surprised me, for I had anticipated, from his eagerness to get hold of the watch, that he would be equally as eager for a share of the gold, and Mr. Brown and myself were both aware that he deserved a handsome reward for the dangers through which he had passed to free us from the inquisitiveness of the bushrangers. Therefore, the more backward Day appeared the more firmly did we insist upon doing justice to his merits.

Mr. Brown and myself consulted together for a few minutes, and then concluded to give him a thousand dollars in gold coin; and when we announced our decision, the shepherd was frantic with delight.

"O, luddy!" he cried, "wouldn't I have a time to-night if I was in London and had this money in my pocket? Wouldn't I drink 'alf and 'alf till I couldn't speak, and then go to bed with ——"

So elated did Day get with the idea that he clapped his hands together, and sprang into the air, cutting antics of the most singular kind. While he was thus expressing his gratitude, and even while his face was teeming with pleasure, I saw a wonderful change come over it. He stopped speaking, and muttered, —

"D—n 'em; now they have done it, and no mistake!"

"What is the matter, Day?" asked Mr. Brown, rather sternly, thinking the remark was applied to us.

The shepherd pointed with his hand in the direction of the main land, and one look was sufficient to convince us that the threat which Sam had uttered was no idle one, for a cloud of black smoke was issuing from the trees, not in one place alone, but in fifty, and before we could recover from our astonishment, a sheet of flame darted from the woods, and gathering headway as it crept along, seized upon the dry grass, and rapidly approached the peninsula.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

The Escape from the Fire.

All the troubles through which we had passed were mere child's play compared to our situation at the present time, for a forest on fire was a danger that was calculated to test our energies to the utmost if we expected to escape with whole skins and our lives. For a few minutes, therefore, we were overwhelmed and speechless, and gazed into

each other's faces for counsel. Our first thoughts were that we could remain on the island and escape the fury of the flames, and so we might have done had we possessed water sufficient to quench not only our own thirst but that of the animals. A moment's reflection, however, convinced us that we could not exist for half a day where we were, with a scorching sun overhead and a roaring fire in front, and that, if we intended to escape, we must begin to make preparations without delay, as every second the flames increased and extended on all sides.

"Pocket the gold," shouted Day, setting us an example with his share. "We will try and save that and our own lives, but as for the rest of the baggage we must leave it behind."

We were not backward in filling our pockets with the dust and coins, and by the time we had secured the last scale Day was saddling the horses and putting on their bridles.

"We can never get the animals through the fire," Mr. Brown said, well knowing the reluctance with which horses approach flames.

"I've thought of that," responded Day, "and intend to cover their eyes with sheepskins."

The idea was a capital one, and was immediately carried into effect. The skins which Day had used to play the ghost were now employed to cover the heads of our restless animals, for as the fire increased they seemed to be aware of their danger, and were with difficulty prevented from plunging into the bog, where they would soon have been smothered in defiance of our exertions. The instant that their eyes were blindfolded they became perfectly quiet, and suffered themselves to be led to the peninsula, which they crossed without accident, and while we debated for a few minutes which course we should take to avoid the danger, the animals remained motionless, as though they had every confidence in our wisdom.

"We must look to you for guidance here," Mr. Brown said, turning to the shepherd, who was attentively watching the course of the flames. "There is a horse for each of us, and a few blows must not be spared to make them carry us safe through the fire."

We threw ourselves into the saddles, and left the pack horse, a stout brute, for Day to take charge of. Every thing that we had packed upon his back we had left on the island, and the only articles that we carried on our own persons were revolvers. Even our powder flasks we emptied for fear of an explosion, as the air was full of cinders blown in all directions by light breezes which began to spring up with the morning sun.

"Which direction shall we take, Day?" I asked, thinking that it was about time we started, as the fire was creeping towards us at a rapid rate.

"'Pon my word, I don't know," he replied, with a puzzled expression upon his face. "You see that the woods on our right are on fire, and so are those on our left leading to the banks of the Loddon. 'Tisn't the trees that I care so much about as the grass. If I only knew whether the grass was on fire beyond the woods on our right I'd give half of the gold I've got in my pockets, and think myself fortunate."

"If our situation is so desperate it won't do to stand here and talk

about it. Let us make a bold push and reach the river if possible, unless you think the bushrangers have retreated in that direction," I remarked.

"Them coveys are safe enough," replied Day, pointing to the mountain, from which we were separated by a wall of fire that almost blistered our faces where we stood. "They have gone up there like so many kangaroos, and no doubt are laughing at the sight, and thinking how surprised the ghost will be when he appears to-night. Them coveys hain't got much respects for beings of this world or 'tother, I should judge by their treatment of the best specimen of a goblin ever got up in any country."

"D—n your long yarns, let's get out of this confounded furnace before we stop to talk," was the response of Mr. Brown, who began to grow impatient under the fiery ordeal.

Day looked as though he would like to discuss the matter, but he altered his mind when he found that the fire was within ten feet of where we stood.

"For God's sake, are you going to keep us here till we are smothered?" yelled my friend; and there was some danger of it, for the smoke swept towards us in clouds, and made us gasp for breath and long for a drink of the sweet water of the Loddon.

Thus urged, Day made another hasty survey of the smoking plain, and then, striking his sharp, bony heels into the sides of his horse, led the way over the burning grass at a tremendous pace, closely followed by Mr. Brown and myself.

The animals, as though aware that their lives and our own depended upon their good behavior, galloped over the plain that separated us from the woods without once balking, although I feared and expected it every moment. After we reached the trees where the fire was raging severely, and where it was impossible to discover the path which we had followed when we were on our way to the treasure, I was fearful that we should be obliged to dismount and trust to our legs for an escape, for to have checked our animals even for a moment would have so bewildered them that we should have lost all control over them. Our good genius, Day, however, by some peculiar landmark, knew the trail in spite of the smoke, and did not hesitate for a moment.

"Keep close to me," he shouted, looking back for a moment, and then, with a wild yell, he gave his horse free rein, and on we dashed close to his heels.

On each side of us the flames were roaring and surging like the breaking of a heavy surf upon the seashore, and every moment the fire was extending by the aid of the grass and dead branches of trees, which were like tinder, no rain having fallen in that part of the country for three months.

We could see but a short distance ahead of us owing to the smoke, and for a while we were in a state of great uncertainty whether there was an outlet in the direction which we were pursuing. Our retreat was cut off, for the fire had rolled across our track, consuming every blade of grass in its course, and our only hope of safety was to continue onward and endeavor to outstrip our enemy.

Suddenly Day checked his horse, and waited for us to gain his side.

"We can't get to the river this way," he said, hurriedly, "for the grass is all on fire in front of us, and is burning like a furnace. Our animals would drop before they got twenty rods, and then where should we be?"

The question was too pertinent to be answered readily, even if we had the time.

"I think that we had better take to the woods on our right and endeavor to gain the mountain, or the foot of it at least. The fire does not spread so fast in the vicinity of the trees, although there is more smoke than on the open land."

"There is danger of our getting confused, and rushing into the fire, instead of out of it," replied Mr. Brown, in answer to my suggestion.

"Not if Day knows the ground," I replied.

"I know every rod of it between here and the Loddon," he answered, promptly.

"Then lead the way, and the risk be on my head," I said, turning my horse's head in the direction of the woods.

The shepherd hesitated for a moment, and while he was considering the matter, a huge kangaroo bounded from the woods on our left, passed within ten feet of us, and disappeared in the smoke that was rising from the trees on our right. A second afterwards my horse suddenly started, and with difficulty could I control him. I thought that the fire had got under his feet, but a glance to the ground convinced me that such was not the case, and that the animal was frightened at something more dreadful than the flames, for creeping across the trail, with head erect and flashing eyes, was a huge diamond snake, nearly fifteen feet long and about fourteen inches in diameter. The serpent was too eager to make his escape, and was too much frightened to think of molesting us, but I was not sorry to lose sight of him, although at any other time I would have given him the contents of my revolver.

"That kangaroo knows the best route for getting clear of the danger. Let's follow him."

Day's idea of following the animal was good, but it was exceedingly probable that the brute was half a mile from us before we made up our minds which direction to take. Kangaroos get over the ground with more than railroad speed, each bound which they make averaging from fifteen to twenty-five feet in length.

We turned our horses' heads and urged them through the smoke, avoiding the fire as well as possible, so that our animals would not become alarmed and refuse to move, except in the direction of danger. By this means we made some progress, and soon hoped to get clear of the trees; but before we had advanced a quarter of a mile a long wall of fire headed us off, and again brought us to a stand still. To retreat was impossible, for the fire was surging after us, and feeding upon the long grass with a fierceness that told us we could not cross the line and hope to live, while if we advanced a like result was certain. On every side of us we could hear the trees crack, and sway to and fro, and then fall with a heavy crash that showed how rapidly the flames had spread, and with what intensity the fire was burning. Our fate began to look doubtful, and I had almost a mind to throw away the gold which loaded

down my pockets, and to possess which I had encountered so many dangers.

"What shall we do now?" demanded Mr. Brown, his voice as firm and apparently as composed as when in Ballarat, surrounded by his policemen.

Day was evidently at the end of his expedients, for he sat on his horse and only stared at us in reply, not offering a word.

"In which direction is Mount Tarrengower?" I asked.

The stockman pointed with his hand to the right of us.

"Are you sure?" I demanded.

"Positive," he answered.

"Then follow me!" and with a word I encouraged my horse, and started at as rapid a pace as possible in the direction indicated.

Mr. Brown and Day followed as close as possible, and for a few minutes we were kept hard at work dodging the branches of trees, and guiding our blindfolded horses through the labyrinths for the purpose of avoiding the fire as much as possible. Sometimes we were compelled to halt until a cloud of black smoke, impregnated with the juice of gum trees and stately palms, had passed over us and revealed the course which it was necessary for us to pursue to find safety. Amidst all this it was a consolation to know that we were not getting into hotter localities, and that the flames were raging more extensively in the quarter which we had left but a minute before, for we could see the fire rolling over the very spot we had stopped at when Day had relinquished the head of the party.

On we went, and at length the smoke gradually diminished, and above the tree tops could be seen the rugged sides of Mount Tarrengower. Even then we did not consider that we were in safety, for a change of wind would bring the fire upon us a second time, and then we should be hemmed in between the sides of the mountain and the woods — no very enviable situation. We felt thankful, however, for our escape so far, and prayed as well as we were able that the wind would hold in its present position until we were in safety.

For a few minutes we sat upon our horses and watched the flames at our feet, — for we were on elevated ground, and could overlook a large portion of the fire — and a grand sight it was to see tree after tree fall with a tremendous crash, sending up sparks and jets of flame, and thick clouds of black smoke which rose high in the air, and then sailed in majestic grandeur in the direction of Ballarat. We were too busy with our thoughts to converse for some time after our escape, but at length Mr. Brown suggested to Day that his sheep would suffer during his absence, even if they were not all destroyed by the fire.

"No fear of that," replied the shepherd, with a grin which showed how much interest he had in his employer's property, forced, as he was, to take care of it by the strong arm of law. "Sheep ain't such devilish fools as to run into fires with their eyes wide open. When I go back I shall find my flock all right, and if I don't 'tain't much matter. My comrades, however, will wonder more about my absence than the animals, and I s'pose they will think I'm a goner."

"How near are we to the station, Day?" I asked.

"Let me see," replied the shepherd, after a moment's reflection.

"We can't be more than five miles from the Loddon, and if we follow the left bank of the river long enough we shall reach Wright's station, where we can get something to eat, and perhaps be sure of a welcome."

"Humph," grunted Mr. Brown, "your directions are not very plain, and you seem to be in doubt whether we will fare well or ill after we gain the farm. Why should we not be received with kindness?"

"Well, to tell you truth," replied the shepherd, with commendable frankness, "I don't think that the looks of you two coveys are very prepossessing, and I have a fear that you will be mistaken for bush-rangers, and get a dose of lead instead of a dinner. I 'spose that if I was to go ahead and speak for ye 'twould be all right."

We could not help laughing at the impudence of the fellow, and yet he was perfectly serious in his belief.

"Let us shape our course for the farm, and not be all day thinking of the matter," Mr. Brown said testily. "If Wright won't give us a supper and a bed we can go without."

"Remember," shouted Day, as we urged our horses along as fast as possible over the uneven ground, keeping close to the base of the mountain, to avoid the fire which was still raging parallel to our course, "I don't hold out hopes that you will be well received. I ain't much acquainted with the covey Wright, so that it will be no use for me to ride in advance."

"Don't distress yourself," replied Mr. Brown, somewhat annoyed to think that a stockman should want to vouch for his respectability; but I looked at the matter in the light of a good joke, and, riding by the side of Day, I managed to discover the reasons for not wishing to appear before the farm house of the proprietor.

It seemed that Mr. Wright was engaged extensively, not only in agriculture but in stock raising, and that to carry on his business it was necessary to employ quite a small army of laborers, as well as a small colony of dogs, who guarded the sheep during the night, and formed a regular cordon around them, into which circle none could enter or depart except the shepherds. In case of an alarm by an invasion of bushrangers, the employees were required to turn out and act as skirmishers to repel the enemy; and as every person was well armed and compelled to be a good marksman, Mr. Wright, after a few battles, in which the bushrangers suffered no insignificant loss, finally concluded that it was better to get their mutton at some station where blows were less plenty and flesh equally as good.

Still, in spite of these drawbacks, Mr. Wright was compelled to be constantly on the alert, and never laid his head upon his pillow of dried grass at night expecting to wake up alive in the morning, for the region in which his farm was situated was surrounded by bands of depredators; and how should he know but they would join forces and make common cause against a man whom they considered an enemy?

CHAPTER LXXIV.

Arrival at Mr. Wright's Station.

A LOVE of excitement was the key to Mr. Wright's secret for remaining on his farm and cultivating it, while danger attended him at every step that he took, unless surrounded by a body guard of laborers. Yet he neglected no precaution to insure his safety, and those under his charge; and for this purpose he had two natives of Australia attached to his farm, and their duty consisted in watching for the footsteps of strangers, and following their trail until satisfied that no wrong was intended; or, if danger threatened, the occupants of the farm could be prepared to meet it from the timely warning of the industrious blacks. I think that I have before spoken of the ability of the Australian to follow a trail with the fidelity of a bloodhound — no matter how light the step or what kind of ground is passed over, the native is never at fault, or thrown off the scent; and even if a dozen men attempt to deceive him, he picks out the footsteps of the person he is in pursuit of, and knows an enemy from a friend.

Their tact and knowledge in this respect is marvellous, and is only equalled by their skill at throwing the boomerang, — a curved piece of wood, measuring from twenty inches to three feet in length.

As I listened to Day's description of the farmer of the Lodden, and his means of repelling attacks, and precaution against surprise, I no longer regretted the dangers of the excursion and its hardships. I longed to see a farmer of Australia, and learn his method of planting, and what kind of tools he used, and all the information which I hoped would be interesting to my agricultural friends in this country. I forgot that I was not clothed in exactly the kind of costume that would insure me a warm reception, and I forgot that the farmers of Victoria, as a general thing, are as aristocratic in feeling as the gentlemanly farmers of England.

I could have wished for a white shirt and a decent riding costume; but as I was destitute of those luxuries, I determined to appear like an American gentleman, even if I didn't look like one.

As for Mr. Brown, he manifested the most profound contempt for clothing when I hinted the matter to him, and concluded by expressing a hope that if Mr. Wright didn't like our personal appearance he wouldn't look at us, which I considered only just and reasonable, although, as a general thing, I prefer open hostility to quiet contempt.

In about two hours time we gained the banks of the Loddon, and quenched our thirst with its pure water, and then followed the stream along for a number of miles until we began to approach signs of cultivation, when we struck a very good road that apparently had been used for the carting of water to the farm house. In a short time we came in view of an immense field of wheat, ripe and ready for reaping, but without a fence or hedge to guard it against the depredations of animals, although, as far as I could judge, the grain had not suffered in that respect.

Still, we met with no one connected with the farm; a circumstance that gave Day some uneasiness, for he was continually urging us to be cautious how we moved along, and to check our horses the instant a word was addressed to us.

"It's all very well for you coveys to pretend that you don't care, but if a few bullets should happen to fly this way and knock you off your horses, what satisfaction would there be in letting the coveys know that they had made a mistake. Recollect, you don't look over genteel."

We calmed the shepherd with assurances that we would be extremely careful, and continued onward, and when we least expected it, a sudden rounding of the road freed us from the trees which grew upon the banks of the Loddon, and we emerged upon an open space containing about sixty acres, and in the middle of the vast square was the farm house belonging to Mr. Wright. It was quite a respectable building, two stories high, with flat roof, and constructed entirely of rough logs, yet fitted together with considerable pretensions to skill and nicety.

On the roof, to keep out the rain, and to prevent the bushrangers or natives from setting fire with burning arrows, was dirt about a foot deep, and sodded over with turf. The body of the building, we could see, was full of loopholes, and commanded every approach, and there was no tree or outhouse sufficiently near to interfere with this arrangement, or any unequal ground which a foe could take advantage of.

At some distance to the left of the castle, as Mr. Brown facetiously called it, were three immense pens, one filled with sheep, and the others with horses and other animals, and I judged there were as many dogs on the outside of the pens as there were rams on the inside, for the instant we appeared in sight we were greeted with such frightfully discordant yelling and barking that I began to fancy we must indeed present a woful spectacle, or we never should be saluted by such vindictive sounds. Still, not a shadow of a human being did we discover, and I began to think that the bushrangers had made a descent, murdered those connected with the farm, and then escaped, when I was suddenly convinced of my error by hearing the report of a musket, and an ounce ball whizzed by my head and struck the ground about ten rods in the rear of us.

"That says, stop where you are, plain enough," remarked Day, checking his horse; an example which we were not slow in following.

"But if we remain here we shall get no supper," I remarked.

"That is the truest word that you ever uttered," cried Mr. Brown, with a grin, at our predicament.

"Will you go forward, Day, and let Mr. Wright know that we are friends?" I asked; but the shepherd shook his head, and declined, and manifested a willingness to retreat from the neighborhood of the house, although I will do him the justice of stating that he showed no signs of fear.

"Look at the cowards at the windows of the house," cried Mr. Brown; and sure enough, the inmates of the building had thrown open the iron shutters, and were gazing at us with some curiosity, although I noticed that each man held a musket in his hand for fear of surprise.

"I wouldn't refuse to speak with all the bushrangers in Australia, if

I had a fortress like that to retreat into," muttered Mr. Brown, with a smile of contempt.

"Let us cross the Lodden, and find the Hawkswood station," suggested Day, "I'll warrant that we shall get something to eat, and perhaps a drink of rum there. I've had a taste of the hospitality of that place more than once."

I was almost resolved to follow the advice, but a look at the heavens convinced me that we should have rain before many hours, owing, probably, to the fire which was raging at a distance, as fiercely as ever, and night was nearly upon us. Besides, I began to feel really exhausted for the want of food and rest, and I was fearful that if Day should miss the trail we might wander about until daylight, and still be some distance from the place we were in search of.

With these opinions I combated both Mr. Brown and Day, and made an impression, for the former exclaimed pettishly, that if I was desirous of remaining, I might devise some way of giving Mr. Wright and his numerous proteges intelligence of our honesty. The task was a difficult one, but I scorned to be at a loss for expedients.

In the bosom of my shirt I had a handkerchief, made of India silk, and of a yellow color, but at a short distance it appeared white, and I thought it would answer for a flag of truce. Therefore, before my companions were aware of my intention, I flourished the handkerchief over my head, and galloped at a moderate pace towards the house, expecting every moment that I should get a shot for my recklessness, but I intended, if there was any firing, to wait until the farmers were satisfied that I meant honestly, provided, of course, I escaped getting hit, of which I was in some fear, I must confess.

Luckily for my safety, Mr. Brown and Day remained where I left them, and were watching my movements with some curiosity, and considerable anxiety. Had they advanced towards the house at the same moment as myself, we should all have bitten the dust, and rich pickings the stockmen would have had emptying our pockets, and boasting of their exploits in shooting three men with but a single effective revolver to defend themselves.

On I galloped, waving my handkerchief in token of friendship, and exciting dismal howls from the canine brutes, whom I expected every moment would desert their flocks and attack me, but I afterwards understood that the dogs were so well trained that no amount of temptation could induce them from their charges. Had it been otherwise, my gallant horse would have had to put his speed to good account, tired as he was.

When within three rods of the house, I halted, and prepared for a parley with the garrison, and I was the more ready to commence it, from the simple circumstance of seeing about a dozen old muskets pointed at me, and the holders of the same glancing along the barrels, as though meaning mischief.

"Can you give me and my friends supper and lodgings to-night?" I asked, addressing the crowd, seeing no one that I supposed was in authority.

"Go away wid ye, ye thaves and murderers," cried a voice "rich with brogue," and I could not help laughing in the fellow's face at the answer.

"We will pay you well for our entertainment," I continued, after I had sufficiently recovered my composure.

"Will ye lave, yer blackguard?" demanded the first speaker, shaking his old gun at me, and motioning for me to depart as soon as possible.

"We have been without food all day," I continued, "and, after escaping the dangers of the burning plains, it seems hard to be driven away from a Christian's door like dogs."

"It's a pity, so it is, that ye wasn't consumed in that same fire. Away wid ye, and don't bother honest people like us. Ye can't come in here, and that's flat."

"I suppose that you imagine we are bushrangers," I said; "in that you are mistaken. We have just escaped from a gang."

"Thin ye had better 'scape back agin, as fast as yer two legs will carry ye," cried the Irishman.

"It's the first time that I ever knew a native of the Emerald Isle to refuse a stranger a crust of bread or a drop of water," I continued, resolved to try what virtue there was in flattery.

"Will yer save yer blarney?" demanded the fellow, again levelling his gun in my direction, a proceeding that I did not thank him for, although I did not manifest alarm.

"Go to the devil!" I cried, thoroughly out of patience, "and send your master to me."

"O, holy St. Patrick! only hear him! He calls me master the devil, and thinks I won't resent the insult. Look out for yer eye, for by the piper that played before Moses, I'll bore yer through and through!"

I believe the fellow would have kept his word, and I was just about to show them my horse's heels, when I heard a man speak in a tone of authority,—

"Up with your guns, and don't make fools of yourselves by shooting an unarmed man."

In obedience to the order the guns were lowered, and a number of the men fell back from the window, and allowed me to get a glimpse of the person whom I supposed to be Mr. Wright. He was a tall, well-built man, with broad shoulders, and a face entirely English, covered with sandy whiskers.

"Who are you?" he asked, with the bluffness and arrogance of a native of Great Britain.

"A man," I replied.

"I have your word for that, but I require better evidence."

"What better evidence do you require?" I demanded.

He did not notice the remark, but continued,—

"I see many people every week, and although they have the form of men, they are villains."

"The more reason why you should treat honest people with courtesy when chance brings them this way," I replied.

"Hear the feller's blarney," muttered the Irishman.

"Silence," said Mr. Wright, and the command was obeyed.

"We have to be extremely cautious whom we admit within these walls," Mr. Wright continued, "for a gang of bushrangers has been prowling around the farm for a week or more, and are endeavoring to

destroy my flocks. How shall I know that you don't belong to the gang?"

He waved his hand in a significant manner, and I could not have been more surprised had an earthquake shaken me from my horse.

"My deeds have always been squared in accordance with the great principles of the fraternity," I replied, and it was pleasing to see what a change took place in the demeanor of the farmer.

"Down with your guns," he shouted, "and unbolt and unbar the door. See to the gentleman's horse, and let us have for supper the best that the station affords."

The heads disappeared from the windows as if by magic, and in a few seconds' time the heavy outer door was thrown open, and forth issued Mr. Wright at the head of his employees. I signalized to Mr. Brown and Day to advance, and then dismounted and met the strong grip of the farmer's hand with one equally as hearty.

"I ask ten thousand pardons," he said, "for my questions, but I am obliged to keep a strict guard over my property, or I should be surprised by the forest rovers, who would amply repay the numerous checks which they have received at my hands, were they able to do so."

"Make no apologies," I replied, "for I don't blame you for classing me with suspicious characters; but the fact is, we have passed through a cordon of flames, and I think our clothing is somewhat damaged, and our personal appearance not very prepossessing. We should not have troubled you had not necessity compelled us."

"No trouble, no trouble," he exclaimed, with all the heartiness of an Englishman who is disposed to be friendly; "I am always glad to see company, provided, of course, it's the right kind."

By this time Mr. Brown and Day had joined us, and were waiting to receive the same welcome that had been bestowed upon me. I introduced them in due form, and gave Mr. Brown his ex-title, which pleased him excessively.

"I know you," Mr. Wright said, addressing Mr. Brown. "Haven't we met before?"

"I should say that we had," replied my friend, scanning the farmer's face keenly.

"You were stationed at one time in Melbourne?" Mr. Wright inquired.

"For a number of years."

"And of course you remember that I landed at that city ten years since, with one hundred pounds in my pocket?"

"Large numbers of emigrants arrived with more money than that," replied the ex-inspector.

"But my case was a peculiar one, for the first night that I stopped on shore my hundred pounds were stolen," continued Mr. Wright.

"Quite a common case," my friend said; "women are fair to look upon after a long sea voyage."

"D—— it, you have hit the nail on its head," cried the Englishman, hastily. "I lost all my money."

"I knew you would say that, if you told all. Go on."

"I complained to the police, and you investigated the circumstances, and found my hundred pounds after some trouble," he continued.

"Be thankful that I was young and inexperienced at that period," cried the ex-inspector, with a laugh.

"More — you refused to accept of a reward that I offered for the recovery of the money."

"I must have been dreaming. I am glad to think that there is one circumstance in my life that I can refer to and not blush," cried my friend, jocosely.

"Bah!" cried the farmer, who didn't believe that Mr. Brown was speaking what he felt. "You gave me good advice, and from it I trace all my property."

"I am glad to think that I have given one person good advice in my lifetime. I wish that I had taken some of it myself."

"I followed your directions and bought stock with my hundred pounds, and now look around and see my flocks. I count my cattle by the thousands," continued Mr. Wright, pointing to his immense pens.

"I remember you," my friend said, "and knew you the instant you spoke, but I preferred to let you recall reminiscences of by-gone days, to see if there is any gratitude in the world."

"Gratitude?" echoed Mr. Wright; "darn it, man, when you are tired of stopping with me I'll give you a hundred head of cattle."

"Don't do it, for mercy's sake. I prefer that you should give us something to eat now. Show your liberality that way, for we are famishing."

"Eat, man! you shall have the best that I can get. Here, Mike, Pat, Peter, where are you all? Take charge of the gentlemen's horses, and give them a feed of grain and a thorough rubbing down. Put supper on the table instantly, and brew us a bowl of punch that will make us sing like nightingales, and sleep like honest men. This way, gentlemen, there is my house — rough and uncouth, but better than the shelter of a tree during a rainy night. You are welcome to my hospitality."

CHAPTER LXXV.

Supper. — Return of Mr. Wright's Scouts.

The room into which Mr. Wright conducted us was on the ground floor, and was about thirty feet deep and fifteen feet wide. Around the walls were hung skins of kangaroos, stuffed parrots, and other birds of gaudy plumage, while confined in brackets were old muskets in sufficient quantities to frighten all the natives of Australia, but their appearance, imposing as they were, would not have sufficiently impressed a bushranger of nerve into the belief that they were dangerous, even if loaded with their proper quantum of powder and lead.

We had hardly crossed the threshold of the building when a shrill voice greeted us with, —

"D—n bushrangers — d—n bushrangers — caught at *last*! — ha, ha! — I knew it! — I said so! — steal sheep, will you?"

We started back at such a reception, and Mr. Brown began to mutter something about "gratuitous insults," when Mr. Wright pointed to a remarkably large parrot that was roosting on the back of a chair, surveying us with quiet dignity, and evidently with considerable worldly wisdom.

Our anger vanished, and we made immediate overtures to Poll, for the purpose of establishing a firm friendship, but our advances were met with dignified coolness, while Day, who attempted to scratch the bird's head, got severely bitten for his pains.

"D—n the beast!" muttered the shepherd, rubbing his finger.

"That's right — swear! D—n it, why don't you swear? Sheep stealers! Who robs people? Ha, ha! Set the dogs on 'em!"

"A precocious parrot," said Mr. Wright, "and he is indebted for his profanity to my men, who learn him much that is bad, and little that is good, and to tell the truth, he learns the former much more readily than the latter."

"In which he closely resembles our policemen," muttered the ex-inspector.

"These gentlemen are my friends," said Mr. Wright, addressing the parrot, and formally presenting us for its distinguished consideration.

"O, friends, hey?" croaked the bird, eyeing us sharply; "why didn't you say so before? give Poll something; pretty Poll!"

We were unable to comply with the request, and the parrot didn't spare us in his denunciations for our illiberality, and to relieve us, Mr. Wright proposed that we should visit his private apartment and change our clothes, seeing that we stood in need of different raiment very much, and having none of our own at hand.

The room into which we were shown was used as a sleeping apartment and wardrobe by the proprietor of the station, and while it contained but few of the luxuries of civilized life, it was not entirely destitute of a comfortable appearance.

In one corner was a rude bedstead, with a hair mattress and blankets, a looking glass of miniature dimensions, a rifle of English pattern, heavy and cumbersome, a pair of splendid duelling pistols, a long sword with basket hilt, and a bowie knife.

"Here's where I sit and read, and sometimes write," said our host, throwing open a window to enable us the better to see his treasures; "my library is small, and I seldom make additions to it, but the few books which I have are like friends whom I can trust, old and true. Now I desire that you shall change your garments, and if you wish, take a bath before supper."

The proposition which our host made was not to be neglected, for my skin felt as though parched in an oven, and my clothes were so scorched that they were ready to fall to pieces. We did not scruple, therefore, to avail ourselves of the courtesy of Mr. Wright, and after a wash in a huge hogshead, that was used for bathing purposes, we once more found ourselves comfortable, with clean garments, and when we were dressed supper was announced.

Day, who had participated in our toils and struggles, and whom we had learned to regard with considerable affection, declined seating himself at the table with us, and all our urging did not overcome his diffidence, although backed by Mr. Wright, but, I must confess, rather feebly, and it was so evident that the farmer did not care about the company of Day that I no longer urged it.

"I saw the fire that is raging in the woods early this morning," Mr. Wright said, when he saw that our appetites were slightly checked, "and I feared that it would spread this way, and so gave orders to drive in the cattle and pen them up until all danger was passed. I was more willing to do this from the fact that my two Australians reported bushrangers in the vicinity, and that, after hovering around for a day or two, they had left for Mount Tarrengower."

While Mr. Wright was speaking, we could hear roars of laughter in the next room, which seemed to be the kitchen.

"My men are at their supper, and I suppose that your follower, whom some of my people tell me belongs at the next station, is amusing them with his wonderful adventures."

"He is as honest a fellow as ever lived, and has served us most faithfully. Without his aid we should not have escaped the fury of as savage a flock of bushrangers as ever roamed through the woods of Australia."

I spoke with some warmth, for I considered that Day deserved as good treatment as ourselves.

"I don't doubt his honesty or his bravery," returned our host, dryly, "but I am compelled to believe that if you knew how much I have to contend with here in the wilderness, hardly knowing friend from foe, and desired to treat all alike, I am sure that you would not think hard of me if I did desire to exclude the shepherd from the table. Be assured that he is happier where he is, and when another stockman visits my farm he will not be expected to sit at the same table with myself. Discipline is what keeps my men in subjection."

Another roar of laughter from the kitchen, and the servant who attended upon our table entered the apartment with a broad grin upon his face.

"Well, Jackson, something is going on in the kitchen that amuses you as well as the rest," Mr. Wright said.

"Yes, sir; that covey from the other station is telling the funniest things about his playing ghost, and frightening bushrangers into fits. He's a wild 'un, and no mistake."

A sudden darkness and pattering of rain drops outside told us that the storm had begun, and we felt thankful that we were under shelter for the night.

"Tell the men who are on duty to look well to the cattle, and then make themselves comfortable for the night," our host said, addressing the man, who seemed to be Mr. Wright's especial attendant.

The person alluded to departed on his errand, and while he was gone we surveyed the heavens from the windows, and found that the clouds were black and full of moisture, while the rain was descending in torrents.

"Let it continue this way for an hour or two, and I shall have the

pleasure of your company for a day or two at least," Mr. Wright said, apparently pleased with the thought.

"Why so?" I asked.

"Because the Loddon will be impassable, and resemble no more the quiet river such as you saw to-day than to-morrow morning will resemble the present moment. But come, let us return to the table, and have our coffee and pipes; cigars I have, if you prefer them."

But no one desired them, for after once getting acclimated to pipes, cigars are of a secondary consideration.

We again took seats at the table, and lighting our pipes, sipped some of the excellent coffee at our leisure, and while the storm raged without, we talked and chatted of the past with as much freedom as though we had been friends all our lifetime.

Lights were brought, and the heavy window shutters closed, and we drew our chairs nearer to each other as the wind howled around the stout building, and the lightning played in the air with extraordinary vividness as the darkness increased.

"This storm will soon extinguish the fire in the brush," Mr. Wright said, "and I shall not be sorry to know that my wheat is no longer in danger of being consumed by fierce flames, instead of hungry men. Ah, well, I have seen many fires raging since I settled on the thousand acres that I own, but somehow I have escaped much injury, excepting once."

"Let us hear the particulars; a story will suit me above all things at this time," I said.

"There is not much of a story connected with the matter, and I'm a poor hand at a yarn, but such as it is you shall have."

He touched a bell, and his attendant entered as promptly as though serving in a first class hotel, and had been trained to the business all his lifetime.

"Is the punch ready?" asked our host.

"Yes, sir."

"Bring it in, then, and clear the table of dishes."

A bowl holding about a gallon was placed upon the table, and the fumes of the Santa Cruz rum were grateful to our nostrils. Mr. Brown rubbed his hands with glee, and was impatient to begin the attack.

"Give the men a stiff glass of grog all round, and when I want you I will ring," said Mr. Wright to the servant.

The man bowed, and left the room to make the hearts of the laborers happy by announcing the gift.

Mr. Wright filled his glass and was about to commence his story, after wetting his lips with the punch, when Jackson suddenly entered the room.

"Well?" asked Mr. Wright, with some surprise.

"Kala and Iala have returned, and desire to see you immediately, sir."

"What is the matter?" asked our host, with visible uneasiness.

"They have seen footprints in the bush, sir," was the brief rejoinder.

"The devil they have. Let them come in and report." And while Jackson was absent Mr. Wright remained in a thoughtful mood.

Jackson was absent about five minutes, when he returned, ushering in two natives of Australia, whose names were Kala and Iala. They

were barcheaded, and the water was running down their necks in miniature streams, while their long, straight hair hung over their shoulders and faces, almost concealing their deep-set, large, piercing eyes, which were fixed upon us in amazement. Their legs and arms were bare, and did not look larger than those of a child, while their long, bony feet were entirely unprotected by shoes or sandals, yet they were so hardened that the tooth of a serpent would have broken in an attempt to bite through the skin.

"Well, Kala, what news?" asked Mr. Wright of the native who appeared to be the spokesman. He spoke in the language of the Australians, but as the reader is not supposed to understand it I shall interpret it, as Mr. Wright did for us.

"We have been in the bush," was the brief rejoinder.

"And what did you see?" was asked.

"We go many miles from here on the trail leading to the big village," Kala said.

"Go on."

"We see many tracks, and we followed them."

"In which direction?" demanded Mr. Wright, eagerly.

"Come this way," the native said.

"Did you see the people?" asked our host.

"We see."

"How many?"

"Six," Kala answered, holding up one of his fingers.

"Bushrangers?" our host continued.

At this question the two natives seemed puzzled, and they looked at each other as though wondering what answer they should return.

"Two of them were not men," at length the native said.

"Boys?" suggested Mr. Wright.

The faintest shadow of a smile stole over their faces as Kala replied, —

"No boys. Wear things like shirt round legs, and funny hats on heads."

"Why, darn it, the rascals mean women," cried our host, with some energy and considerable relief.

"Yes," was the prompt reply of Kala.

"They won't hurt you, man, unless they happen to fall in love with your black skin and marry you. Then I'd not be responsible for your head."

"Men have long guns, and little guns in belts," continued Kala.

"Pooh!" said Mr. Wright, turning to us and refilling our glasses, "the poor fellows have got frightened at their shadows. They have seen a small party of miners on their way to Ballarat, and it's probable that they have missed the direct road and got on one of the numerous trails which sometimes puzzle the best stockmen. They will find their way out after a fashion, although this is rather a hard night for exposing females. You can go," he said, addressing the two natives, but the men still lingered as though not satisfied with their visit.

"Miners no kill children," Kala exclaimed, briefly.

"How? Who has killed children?" demanded Mr. Wright, setting his glass upon the table, its contents untouched.

Mr. Brown pricked up his ears and listened, for he had a slight knowledge of the aboriginal language, and understood a portion of the conversation.

"Men take child and throw against a tree. No cry more," Kala said.

"The brutes!" muttered Mr. Wright, struck with consternation at the atrocity of the deed.

"Four men, two women," continued Kala, holding up his fingers for us to count. "All come this way, and seem in a hurry. Women cry, and men swear; men make them ride on horses to go fast."

"This is news indeed," Mr. Wright said, turning to us, "and I hardly know what to make of it. Can you solve the riddle?" addressing Mr. Brown.

"It is plain," my friend rejoined. "A party of miners have been attacked by the bushrangers, and the latter are now endeavoring to escape with two women prisoners. The fellows probably belong to Tyrell's gang, and will make towards Mount Tarrengower to join him."

The solution seemed probable, and for a few moments there was a profound silence. The natives glanced from face to face as though endeavoring to read the thoughts of the white men, although they did not appear much distressed at the events which they had related.

"I pity the poor women," remarked Mr. Wright, at length. "Their fate will be a sad one, and death a welcome release from their sufferings."

"Can't you make an effort for their release?" I asked, but our host shook his head.

"The night is dark and stormy," he said, "and it's impossible to tell where the party is at the present time. To-morrow we may be able to do something."

"To-morrow will be too late," replied Mr. Brown. "The rogues by that time will have joined the main body of the gang, and will laugh at our efforts to dislodge them from their rendezvous on the mountains."

Still our host did not seem impressed with the idea that we could afford the unfortunate females relief, although I judged that his disposition to do so was strong.

"Ask Kala if he thinks that he can find the fellow's trail to-night, and promise him from me a pound of tobacco and a bottle of rum if he succeeds," Mr. Brown said, addressing Mr. Wright.

The message was conveyed to the natives, and Kala's eyes sparkled at the idea of gaining the promised luxuries, but Iala did not seem so enthusiastic, owing to his name not being mentioned in connection with the presents.

"Tell Iala from me," I exclaimed, "that he, too, shall have a pound of tobacco and a bottle of rum like his brother if he succeeds."

The look of displeasure disappeared from the dark face of the native as he heard the offer, and he displayed his sharp, white teeth in token of approval.

"The men go by the old trail through the forest. They will not trust the new road leading to the house for fear of meeting our people. The trail is much longer, but safer. After they get through the woods they will have to cross a mud creek. The horses will refuse to enter the

water, and considerable time will elapse before they can be got across. If we can meet them at the creek there is no escape for them."

Such were the expressions of Kala, uttered slow and distinct, as though he was weighing each word, and knew the importance of good counsel. We had not much time to consider the matter, for the native informed us that he and his brother had run with all their speed to the house, after once making sure that the bushrangers intended to take the trail instead of the road.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your opinion on the subject? Shall we sally forth, like knights-errant of old, and rescue the women from the clutches of the devils, or shall we sit here and finish our punch, and then go to bed? I am ready to hear a few words on both sides of the question, but no long arguments."

Our host meant work; I could see that by his flashing gray eyes.

"Can't we drink the punch after we return?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Ay, and as much more as you wish," promptly responded our host, rising from the table, an example that we were not slow to follow.

Jackson, who had remained waiting in the room during the interview, now stepped forward, as though aware that his services would be required by his master.

"Bring me my pistols, and oil-cloth coat and cap, and be in a hurry," were the only commands that Mr. Wright issued, and Jackson, who knew the man's impulses, did not delay an instant in executing the order, and with the articles named he brought coats and water-proof hats for us, while to our surprise, he placed upon the table the revolvers belonging to Mr. Brown and myself, cleaned, oiled, and loaded.

"I supposed that you would want them in good condition when you left the farm, so while you were at supper I took the liberty of attending to them," Jackson said, in an apologetic tone, as though fearful that he had exceeded instructions.

"You are deserving of a pardon, and hang me if I don't get you one before six months are passed," cried my friend, enthusiastically, after a slight examination of his weapon, which showed him that it was loaded correctly and capped with great nicety.

The poor fellow started with surprise, and his face flushed with agitation. I saw him turn away, as though ashamed to display his weakness.

"There is no such joyful news for me, sir," he said, at length, in as firm a voice as he could command.

"Don't you believe that story," cried Mr. Brown, heartily. "Plenty of men have received pardons, and they didn't deserve them as much as you. My word for that."

"Bushrangers get there before us," muttered the natives.

"Kala is right. We must be under way, or the fellows will slip through our fingers. One drink all round, and here's success to our expedition."

While I was fitting my head gear the door opened, and in walked Day, his eyes glistening as though he had drank a cup too much of Mr. Wright's strong water.

"No, you don't," he said, surveying us from head to foot; "if you think that you can get off without the best ghost that the country can produce you are mistaken. You can count me in."

"Then hurry and get ready," I exclaimed, "for we have not a moment to lose."

"Ready?" asked the shepherd, "ain't I all ready as I am? I don't want your ile-skins to keep off a little wet. I'm used to it. Lead the way, blackies, and I'll keep close to your heels."

"But you have no weapons," Mr. Wright said.

"Ain't I got 'em? Look here!" and to my surprise, he produced from the bosom of his flannel shirt a large pair of horse pistols, which he had borrowed from one of the farm hands.

"You'll do; go ahead," our host said. And as we sallied into the entry we saw that all the laborers were drawn up in a line, as though to take formal leave of us.

"Please, sir, let me go wid you," I heard the familiar voice of the Irishman, who greeted me on my arrival, say.

"And me," cried a dozen voices, in the same breath.

"I don't want you all, but Mike may go," was the brief reply.

"Glory to God! we'll lick thunder out of all the bloody bushrangers that iver dared to show their homely faces this side of the Loddon. I'm off;" and Mike, who feared that the order for his going would be revoked, snatched a long spear that stood in the entry, and rushed out of the house hatless and shoeless, and full of fight.

"Take good care of the house, Jackson," Mr. Wright said, addressing his servant, who stood near him.

"You don't wish me to accompany you, sir?" he asked.

"No, no. Stay here and take care of the house, and mind that you defend it against all odds, in case of an attack."

"Bushrangers move quick," muttered Kala.

"I'm coming. Now, gentlemen, we will try the speed of your limbs;" and out of the house we sallied, and stood in the driving storm for a few minutes, completely blinded by the sudden transition from light to pitchy darkness.

"Follow Kala," muttered the native; but the request was an impossibility, because Kala was invisible even a foot from where we stood.

"Give the strangers your arms, and lead them until their eyes get accustomed to the darkness," Mr. Wright said, addressing the natives.

"That is a good arrangement for us, but how are you to find the way?" cried Mr. Brown.

"We know every foot of land within a circle of five miles," was the prompt response of our host; and to show that he made no idle boast, he started towards the field of wheat which we had noticed early in the afternoon, while we followed close at his heels as best we could, much to the disgust of the natives, I have no doubt, for they could scarcely restrain their impatience at the slowness of our pace.

The dogs saluted us with a mighty howl as we passed them, but a word from their master quieted their valor, and by the time we had got clear of the cattle pens our eyes were sufficiently accustomed to the darkness, and were enabled to dispense with the guidance of Kala and Iala, who gladly got at the head of the column and led the way towards the creek, which it was stated the bushrangers would have to pass.

"Under this tree," said our host, pointing to a gum tree of gigantic

proportions, "I killed one of the largest diamond snakes that I ever saw in the country. There used to be a nest of them near this place, but I think that they are exterminated by this time. You recollect the snake, do you not?" he continued, addressing the natives in their dialect.

"We remember," was the brief reply.

"Couldn't you conveniently change the conversation?" Mr. Brown asked, and I shared his interest in the matter, for I didn't like the topic in so dark a night.

"Pooh! you ain't afraid of snakes, are you?" Mr. Wright asked, in a tone that implied that he was not.

"Well, I don't care if I confess that I have seen more agreeable sights than a d—n big, black snake, with a mouth large enough to swallow a baby without much trouble. I don't wish to be rigid, but it strikes me that I prefer daylight when the conversation is tending towards such cheerful topics."

I could see that Mr. Brown was intently engaged in scanning the ground while speaking, as though he feared there might be a few of the varmints unkilled from the nest spoken of.

"About a mile further, gentlemen," and we felt thankful for the information, for a more disagreeable night's tramp, so far, I had never experienced. Still, the thoughts of the two suffering women enabled me to keep my spirits up, and to press forward with eagerness to the point at which we expected to relieve them.

There was no cessation to the rain, and the lightning was as vivid as ever, but the thunder was rolling away to the southward, and muttering and growling as though sorry at having relinquished the battle without more of a struggle.

"If I was only as wet within as I'm without, it's in fighting trim I'd be," Mike said, addressing the shepherd, who was tugging along with the most stoical indifference as to the falling rain and bad road.

"I can fight, wet or dry," was the answer.

"And can't I do the same?" asked Mike, inclined to take umbrage at the remark.

"I suppose so."

"Show me a thing that an Irishman can't do as well as an Englishman," cried Mike.

"Can you play the ghost like me?" demanded the shepherd.

"And why not?"

"Because, who ever heard of a ghost speaking with the brogue?" asked the stockman, triumphantly.

"Bedad, I didn't think of that," Mike muttered, completely crushed by this new evidence of his companion's superiority.

"If you two grumblers don't stop your wrangling I'll choke you," Mr. Wright exclaimed, angrily.

"I'm dumb," Mike said.

"I'm silent as a corpse," cried the undertaker.

"I'll spake no more this night," continued Mike.

"See that you don't," answered our host.

"Divil a bit, till I see a bushranger, and then I'll give him a taste of my spear."

"That you may do, and you shall have a glass of grog for every one that you kill," answered Mr. Wright.

"Holy St. Patrick! you don't say so. Don't any one go near 'em but me. I'll fight the thaves and vagabonds every one, single handed and alone, like a Killarney man that I am."

For twenty minutes we continued on our course, expecting to strike the creek every moment, — yet the night was so dark that it was impossible to tell whether we were on the trail, or wading over the pasturage of the farm.

Even Kala was at fault, and glanced towards the trees, and examined them to discover if we were in the proper locality, but apparently without much success, and I began to think that our expedition was a failure, when the native uttered a grunt.

"Well, Kala, what now?" asked Mr. Wright.

"There be creek," he said, and by the aid of a flash of lightning we could see his thin black arm pointing to a line of trees on our right.

"And the trail?" suggested our host.

"We reach it by and by. Come now, and don't talk."

We followed the native, with the renewed hope of soon terminating an adventure, and as we gained the edge of the gum trees, which were convincing proof that we were near the water, the Australians bent themselves to the task of finding the trail, or the place where the bushrangers were expected to ford. On their hands and knees they crawled about from place to place, aided occasionally by a flash of lightning, but still they were unsuccessful, though not discouraged. Their natures were too patient for that.

"To the devil with the trail," muttered Mike, hitting one of the prostrate natives with his spear. "Let's find the brook, and then we'll be all right, shan't we? Find the main thing first, and then foller up the little ones, used to be the advice of me father, God rest his soul, and keep him well supplied wid whiskey in the nixt world! Ah, what a man he was to be sure! You knew him, sir?" continued Mike, addressing Mr. Wright, who was awaiting the result of the Australians with exemplary patience, considering that the rain was falling in torrents.

"Be quiet," said our host, "or if you must do something go and see how near we are to the creek, and don't make a noise."

"I'll do that same," muttered Mike, "but it's the opinion of a man who knows more than a dozen nagers, that the creek is a mile from here in the udder direction."

He went on his mission, grumbling at the supposition that the creek was near us, when suddenly we heard a loud splash, and Mike's voice raised in supplication.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MIKE TUMBLES INTO THE RIVER.—ARRIVAL OF THE BUSHRANGERS.

"THAT d——d Irishman has tumbled into the creek," cried Mr. Wright, endeavoring to suppress a laugh that did find utterance.

"Here's the river, sure!" shouted Mike, "and a cussed mane one it is. Help me out!"

"Be quiet," said Mr. Wright, "or you'll alarm the bushrangers."

"And do you intend that I shall strangle myself for the purpose of letting the blackguards git kilt?" remonstrated the Hibernian; "I've swallowed a gallon of the dirty water already, and it's cowld on my stomach. Help me out, will ye?"

We reached the scene of the Irishman's disaster, and were compelled to wait for a flash of lightning for the purpose of seeing his situation. When the flash did reveal his position, we saw that he was clinging to some rocks most tenaciously, while the boiling waters were bubbling over his head, which he made no attempt to raise beyond the reach of danger.

"Crawl up the bank, you loon!" cried Mr. Wright, but the advice was unheeded.

"Save me!" yelled Mike; "I can't swim and I'm filled with the bloody dust, that weighs me down like lead. A thousand dollars to the man who gives me his hand first."

"Well, give me the thousand dollars, and I'll help you out," Mr. Wright said, facetiously.

"Ah, master dear, won't you take my word for the money, or wait till I arn it?"

"Just as I always thought," grumbled our host; "an Irishman will promise any thing in distress, even while he knows that he has no means of performing his engagements."

"But isn't it better to do so, master dear, than to make no promises and die?" asked the Irishman, and I rather thought that he had him on that question.

"Perhaps you are right," our host answered, and extending his hand, he helped Mike to terra firma, and landed him just as Kala informed us that the ford was ten or twelve rods down the stream.

Mike recovered his spear, and we once more started, under the guidance of the natives, and quickly gained the spot that we had spent so much time in searching for.

The ford had been used but seldom, and resembled the rest of the creek, with the exception that the bushes and underbrush had been cut from the banks of the stream, so that horses, and other cattle, after fording, could gain the plain without trouble.

Kala threw himself upon his hands and knees, and carefully examined, by the lightning flashes, the various footprints which marked the spot, and which the heavy rain had failed to wash away.

"Well, Kala," Mr. Wright said, impatiently.

"No come yet," answered the native, quietly.

"Are you sure of that?" our host asked.

"Yes, horses no cross stream now," was the reply.

"I might have known that, if I had only given the subject a thought," muttered our host.

"Well, what are we to do?" asked Mr. Brown, gathering his oilcloth around his person, and evidently thinking of the punch, and a good night's rest; "are we to stay here until daylight, and watch for a party of men who may be upon the summit of Mount Tarrengower at the present time? I wouldn't object to waiting, but I don't like the idea of sitting here and doing nothing, while the rain is endeavoring to obtain a nearer aequaintance with my neck and bosom."

"I don't see any other course," Mr. Wright replied; "it's evident that the devils have not crossed the creek, and can't to-night, but the streams of Australia subside rapidly, and the instant the rain ceases to fall they will attempt to ford. We must stay here and watch for the scamps. Remember the female prisoners."

"It's all very well to say remember the females, but if I ruin my health who is to remember me, and take care of me?" grumbled Mr. Brown.

"I will," promptly responded our host.

"Then I suppose that I must stay here all night, and make a fool of myself by running my head into danger, as I have done fifty times before, and get no thanks for it — hullo! what was that?"

Before Mr. Brown spoke, Kala had glided to the side of Mr. Wright, and called his attention, in a quiet manner, to a crashing of branches that he had heard on the other side of the river. Our host was too busy listening to the ravings of Mr. Brown to pay attention to him at that moment, and the native knew the disposition of his master too well to be imperative, so Kala didn't have the honor of alarming our squad, or calling attention to what was going on on the other side.

In an instant after Mr. Brown's exclamation, there was a breathless silence, and not a man moved to the right or left.

"They come," whispered Kala.

He was correct in his supposition, for in a few minutes we could hear the party we were in pursuit of halt at the edge of the brook, opposite to us, and discuss the prospect of attempting to ford, high as the water was.

We quietly retreated behind trees and bushes, so that the lightning should not reveal our presence to the enemy, but we were no sooner secreted than we were rewarded by getting a view of the four bush-rangers, who were holding horses, on which were mounted the two females, whose capture had so excited our sympathy.

"D——n it, Bill," I heard one of the fellows exclaim, for the creek was not more than four yards across, "didn't I tell you that we couldn't ford here to-night with the hosses? If we had come the other way 'twould been all right."

"Yes, and run our heads flat agin that d——d Wright, who is always on the lookout, with his tribe of cussed Irishmen, ready to fight or drink bad whiskey," grumbled the man whom they had called Bill.

"Do ye hear him reflecting on me country?" whispered Mike, grasp-

ing his long spear, as though he would like to encounter the libellers of his countrymen without a moment's delay.

"Be quiet," ordered Mr. Wright, "and let us hear what the villains talk about."

"If it hadn't been for these 'ere wimin, we might have been out of this fix," cried the first speaker, still grumbling.

"Well, what could we do with 'em, 'cept bring 'em along?" asked Bill.

"Do with em?" cried the ruffian, with a bitter oath, "why, draw our knives across their throats, and let 'em run. That's the way to clear out prisoners. Women have no business with the gang. There's always a quarrel about 'em."

"And 'spose there is? ain't it a compliment to the dear creatures? I'd rather fight for 'em, I tell you, than not see their faces after they get good natured, and the cap'n generally brings 'em round in a precious short time."

"Eh, don't he?" grunted the third man, speaking for the first time.

"I tell ye my plan is best, and it's time ye knowed it. We carry half a dozen into camp to eat up the grub, and make the men lazy. There's no getting work out of the coveys while they is alive, and you know it."

"For pity's sake kill us, and end our misery," I heard one of the females say, appealing to the fellow who seemed in favor of killing prisoners, to save the trouble of taking care of them.

"If I had my way, I'd do it d——d quick," he grumbled.

"We are tired, and can hardly sit on the horses. For the sake of your mothers, who were women, leave us here in the wilderness to perish, or to find shelter, as it shall please Heaven."

"Cease that whine of yours, or I'll throw you into the creek," threatened the ruffian of the party.

"Do so, if you dare!" exclaimed another voice, which I imagined belonged to a female of more advanced age than the first speaker; "you are ugly enough for any thing," she continued, growing excited as she proceeded, and raising her voice until it approached a scream, "but I don't believe that you have the true courage of a man. A man!" she repeated, "you are nothing but a tailor. Where's your goose?"

I could hear the bushrangers indulge in a chuckling laugh, as though the language used to their companion was relished.

"Stop your mouth, you dirty ——, or I'll stuff a goose down your throat!" shouted the ruffian, furious with rage.

"You?" she asked, contemptuously; "why, if my old man was within sound of my voice, you would run like a sheep from a dog. You are the biggest coward connected with the gang, and they only keep you 'cos you can mend their clothes. A tailor! Bah, you are only the ninth part of a man, and a botch at that."

"By G—d, woman, you shall feel the length of my knife if you don't close your mouth," shouted the ruffian, that the woman was goring to madness.

"O Nancy, do be quiet," cried her companion.

"Keep quiet for the threat of that braggart?" the shrill-voiced woman demanded; "why, if I had a bodkin I'd spit him on it."

"Would you?" cried the bushranger; "then I'll give you a taste of the same sort of stuff!"

We heard a struggle for a few seconds, and then the earnest tones of the most liberal ruffian in remonstrance.

"Put up your knife, you fool, and don't let a woman get the better of you. Don't you see that she's trying to provoke you to kill her."

"And I will do it, too," yelled the brute.

"No you won't, not as long as I've got charge of this squad. I ain't going to do all the work, and then let you act as you please, by a d——n sight. Touch that woman, and I'll make a hole in your side big enough to throw in a Bible. Put up your knife, and let us see if we can't cross the creek before daylight."

"Well, don't let her insult me again, that's all," the fellow said, in reply to the threat, although it seemed that he was prepared to obey the order, much as he disliked it.

"Insult you! you miserable specimen of a fool? why, it would be impossible to insult you, for your life is but an insult to your Maker!" cried the shrill-voiced woman, who had been addressed by the name of Nancy.

"I'd like to hire that woman to do my scolding," whispered Mr. Wright. "Lord, how she would make the men fly if they didn't come to dinner at the exact time."

By a flash of lightning we could see three of the bushrangers examining the banks of the creek, for the purpose of judging whether it could be forded by the horses or not.

They seemed to decide against its feasibility, for we heard them grumbling at the idea of stopping there all night, and getting sighted by "d——d old Wright" in the morning.

Our host listened to the complimentary remarks about himself with great glee, for it showed that he was a power that was respected by the robbing fraternity, and that they took good care to visit his range of land as little as possible.

"Are we to stay here in the wet all night?" grumbled Mr. Brown.

"I don't see how we are to avoid it," Mr. Wright replied.

"Let us cross the creek, and take those fellows in the rear," I whispered; "in half an hour we can have every one of them prisoners, or else *hors du combat*."

Mr. Wright didn't like the project, as he thought that it was running too great a risk. Mr. Brown meditated on the undertaking, while the ghost was pleased with the idea, and vowed that he could accomplish the project alone. As for Mike, he was in ecstasies at the plan, only he couldn't swim, which somewhat damped his ardor.

"Ask Kala if there is a place where we can cross, where the water is not over our heads?" I inquired of Mr. Wright.

He put the question, and the native replied that a few rods down the stream, at a bend, we could cross on a bar, where the water would not be more than up to our armpits.

Mr. Wright no longer hesitated, but gave the order to move down the stream to the place proposed, and as the rain had nearly ceased, and the moon was high in the heavens, we had no difficulty in finding the spot which Kala indicated.

Our only trouble was to prevent the bushrangers from seeing our movements, so that they should not be prepared for our reception. This we were enabled to do by keeping within the shade of the bushes and trees, which grew in profusion upon the banks of the stream.

"Lead the way, Mike, and find out the deep places with your spear," commanded Mr. Wright, but the Irishman held back.

"I couldn't think of taking advantage of my betters, and going before 'em," pleaded Mike.

"Are you afraid?" our host demanded, angrily.

"Divil a bit, master; but it's misgivings I have about the water. What it was made for, 'cept to mix with punch, I don't see."

"Kala go first," muttered the native, and without waiting for orders, he dropped quietly into the stream, followed by Iala.

"The divil! but can't I go where the nager does?" demanded Mike, and he was up to his shoulders in the brook before we could answer him.

The ghost followed Mike, and then the rest of us, leaving our oil-cloth coverings on the bank of the stream, crossed without difficulty, taking good care that our revolvers were kept dry.

"Now, I want all to keep silent, and obey my orders," whispered Mr. Wright; "when I give the word to fire, do so, but not before.

"Now then, let us steal forward as fast as possible, and Kala, you and Iala can remain behind, if you please."

"Kala and Iala will go with you," was the prompt reply, and I marvelled at it, for the natives are dreadfully afraid of firearms when in the the hands of white men.

"Now, gentlemen, let us onward, and may the God of battles give us success. If any accident should befall either of us, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we suffered in a good cause. Be careful how you step, and don't be impatient."

Mr. Wright placed himself at the head of the column, and moved along carefully, and with some considerable knowledge of woodcraft, although I almost lost all patience by his continually stopping and listening, as though that part of the performance was really necessary to insure success.

The rain had now entirely ceased, and the black clouds overhead had parted, and showed light fleecy ones, tinged by the rays of the moon, which was struggling to show its face, as though angry at having been hid from the earth for such a length of time.

This circumstance required our movements to be prompt if we wished to surprise the ruffians, but Mr. Wright was not a man to be hurried by such trifles. He had a peculiar idea of how such matters should be conducted, and neither Mr. Brown nor myself were disposed to interfere with his plans.

Suddenly, when within twenty rods of the place where the bushrangers were camped we saw a light, and for a few minutes Mr. Wright was uncertain whether to advance or retreat, thinking that the light was intended as an ambush to draw us under fire.

In vain I explained that the bushrangers had kindled a fire for the purpose of cooking a sheep, or a portion of one, and Mr. Brown entertained the same idea, but Mr. Wright said we were young men, and rash at that, and that we were not to be trusted.

We were more amazed than indignant, knowing that our host regarded our safety more than his own, for he was as brave as a lion, and would have willingly fought the whole gang had it been necessary to prove his courage.

At length I volunteered to act the part of a scout, and investigate matters, but for a long time Mr. Wright would not listen to my advances, until I saw that there was a prospect of our remaining on the ground all night, and then I tore myself away, and requested my friends to remain quiet until my return.

This they promised to do, and I started on my mission, not a dangerous one, as I knew full well, for the ruffians did not suspect the presence of our force, and I felt certain that they had no sentinels posted.

The result justified my expectations, for when I had crawled as noiselessly as a cat to within a rod of the light, I saw that the robbers had in some way managed to kindle a fire, which, by the way, attracted myriads of flies and mosquitoes, and they were biting as only Australian flies and mosquitoes know how to bite, much to the rage of the bushrangers, who were cooking meat, and endeavoring to beat off the cloud of insects by threshing their heavy hands about their heads, and uttering oaths that were frightfully original and emphatic.

They were coarse-looking fellows, but dressed better than bushrangers usually were, and I accounted for it by supposing that they had made a successful plundering expedition, and got new suits from their victims; and such I afterwards found to be the case.

I endeavored to get a view of the faces of the women, and by changing my position I succeeded. The youngest one was not more than twenty-five years of age, but she looked careworn and weary, and seldom removed her hands from her face, except to answer a question addressed to her by her companion, who seemed about forty years of age, and by the flickering light of the fire I read determination upon every line of her countenance, weather-beaten and grim as it was.

The bushrangers were broiling their meat upon sticks, and eating it with a relish that smacked of a long fast; and while the women were seated near the fire on saddles taken from the horses, which were tied to a tree, and were browsing upon the tender branches, the men did not offer them food, until one fellow, whose appetite seemed sated, offered the younger one his stick, upon which was a huge lump of flesh nearly raw.

She declined the tempting morsel with a shudder, and the action produced an oath from the ruffian, and an insulting gesture, so vile that I could hardly keep my hand from seeking the lock of my revolver and shooting him on the spot.

"O, well, Miss Dainty, you'll come to your appetite one of these days, see if you don't. Mark what I tell you;" and the other ruffians smiled at their companion's wit.

"There's blood on the hand that offered her food—her husband's blood. How do you suppose she can touch what you feel disposed to give?" cried the elderly woman, who was called Nancy.

"Hullo, old croaker, I thought that you were asleep," the bushranger said; but still I noticed that he glanced at his hand, and wiped it on his clothes, as though the stain was burning his flesh like a coal of fire.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

Capture of the Bushrangers.

"I've not been asleep, but still I've had a dream," Nancy replied to the insulting taunt of the robber.

"Hullo, here's a go. An old woman can dream with her eyes open. Tell us what it was all about, old Tabby."

The woman looked sternly at her tormentor, but did not deign to reply; but the robbers were not disposed to have her rest in peace.

"Come, Tabby, tell us the dream," cried the first speaker.

"You would know it, would you?" she asked, her dark face looking grim and sardonic in the wavering light of the fire, which was kept up by throwing on wood that had long laid exposed to the hot sun of Australia.

"To be sure I would; and, while you are about it, tell my fortune. Whether I shall be rich and marry a princess, like them old fellers, hundreds of years ago, that we read about in some book, blast me if I know the name of it. Come, fire away while I smoke my pipe, and try to kill a few of these d——d mosquitoes that have got bills longer than a criminal lawyer in full practice in Old Bailey."

The man filled his pipe with tobacco, an example that was followed by those who had finished gorging, and after he had lighted it, he turned his head in the direction of the prisoners, as though signifying that he was ready to listen.

"The only wife that you will marry will be the gibbet," the old woman said, spitefully.

"Peace, you old hag," cried the bushranger, angrily. "How dare you talk to me in that sort of way?"

"I thought that you wanted to hear what I have been dreaming about?" she replied, with a sneer.

"So I do, but don't you mention gibbets, do you hear, 'cos you might provoke me, and then you would dangle from one of these trees, a scarecrow that would cause old Wright much wonder. Now you go ahead."

"I dreamed that I was in a crowd of excited people, who were walking towards a prison where they said an execution was to take place. I went with them, for I felt that I had received so many injuries at the hands of men that it would be joy to my wounded heart to see them suffer. I struggled until I reached the front ranks of the crowd, and then waited patiently until a procession, headed by soldiers with solemn music, left the prison and marched towards the scaffold."

"Didn't I tell you not to talk about such things?" cried the bushranger, fiercely.

"Then I will not;" and the woman remained silent.

"Let her go on with the yarn," the other robbers exclaimed. "Let her tell what she likes about hanging coveys, if she pleases. Fire away, old woman."

Thus commanded, she resumed the subject of her pretended dream.

"I thought that I saw three prisoners, with faces covered with black crape, march with trembling steps towards the scaffold, while the hangman, who walked beside them, continually shouted, with a voice so loud that it was heard by every one, 'Behold, these men are about to be executed for murder and robbery. Don't pray for them, Christians, for your prayers will be in vain. They are denounced by God and man, and hell alone knows how to punish them as their many crimes deserve.'"

"You old she devil, can't you tell us something more lively than that?" demanded one of the bushrangers, glancing around uneasily.

"The best is yet to come," she replied, calmly, her eyes fixed upon vacancy, as though she really saw the scenes she was narrating.

"Well, let's have the rest, and don't be too hard on bushrangers, if it's all the same to you."

"I saw the procession reach the scaffold, and the three condemned men ascend the steps, although they trembled so that they had to be supported by the soldiers, for, though they could kill and rob, they were cowards at heart, and were to die like dogs."

"They should have given the coveys a pint of brandy each, and then they would have been all right," grunted the fellow whom the bushranger called Bill.

"A prayer was made by the clergyman," continued Nancy, not heeding the interruption, "and then the men were informed they could say any thing if they wished. The crape was removed from their faces, and I saw ——"

"Who?" exclaimed the listeners, eagerly.

"Your face, and yours, and yours," she cried, pointing to three of the men, who sprang to their feet with frightful oaths, and murder in their hearts.

"Let's hang her," cried one.

"Burn her for a witch," said another.

"D——m her," cried the third; while the fourth, who seemed to be much pleased that he was left out of the galaxy of rascality, remained silent and thoughtful.

"Don't harm her," exclaimed the younger woman, removing her hands from her face, and endeavoring to shelter the person of her companion; but the bushrangers were regardless of her entreaties, and pushed her aside with rudeness.

I did not stop to see more. I rapidly made my way back to Mr. Wright and party, who were anxiously expecting me, for they had begun to grow alarmed at my absence.

"Not a moment is to be lost," I said. "Follow me, and make no noise."

"What is up?" demanded Mr. Wright, who perhaps did not like to have his command usurped so rudely, although he did not object.

"I cannot stop to explain now. Haste, or there will be murder committed," I replied.

No more questions were asked, and in less than five minutes after we were in motion we were near enough to the bushrangers to witness their operations. They were holding a council, and debating violently

what sort of death poor Nancy should die, but could not agree. They supposed her words were deserving of instant punishment, and each man thought his method of taking her life the more praiseworthy. The discussion saved Nancy, for we were enabled to reach the spot before the fellows could make up their minds.

Even in that dreadful moment the tongue of Nancy did not lose its bitterness, and she was bold enough to boast that her words would come true, and then what she had told as a vision would prove a reality.

"Now, then, men, rush on, but don't use your pistols unless necessary. Let us make them prisoners," whispered Mr. Wright.

We answered back that we were ready, and dashed forward just as the ruffians had decided that to hang the woman would be a more pleasant spectacle than to burn her.

"Hurrah for Ireland," shouted Mike, springing into the clearing where the enemy were encamped.

The bushrangers were so taken by surprise that they had no chance to gain possession of their weapons, or to beat a retreat. One fellow, when he saw us emerge from the bushes, drew his knife and struck at Mike; but it was the last blow that he ever made, for the enraged Irishman shortened his spear, so that he could use it to more advantage, and then drove it through the body of his opponent, and from the squirming wretch's back protruded the barbed point. The fellow threw his arms wildly over his head, and fell to the ground, and with his last breath cursed his slayer and the whole of mankind.

There was not much for us to do, although every man present, including the two natives, performed the limited part assigned with fidelity and despatch.

The ghost, whose true English instincts would not allow him to be outdone by Mike, made the welkin ring with shouts for England and himself at the grand charge, and then had deliberately knocked down the most burly of the robbers, and placed his foot upon his breast, and held him there until the melee was ended.

Of course, the other robbers were easily disposed of, for we were two to one; but even after we had them securely pinioned, they taunted us with cowardice, and dared us to meet them in open fight, where they could stand some chance for their lives. Their complaints were unheeded, although Mike and the ghost both expressed a wish to meet two of the men, and give them fair play, according to the well-known rules of the prize ring of London, of which institution the shepherd professed to have vast admiration. The idea was not to be thought of, and the two champions were discontented.

The women had remained spectators of the scene without offering to escape, for they knew into whatever hands they fell they could not be treated much worse than they had been, and just at the moment we made our appearance a change was quite desirable.

I thought that once I heard the shrill voice of Nancy raised in thanksgiving to the Lord for the rescue, and the death of the bushranger, but I was so busy at the moment that I did not pay much attention.

"Ladies," said Mr. Wright, "we have rescued you from your unpleasant company, and I shall take great pleasure in offering you a

portion of my house until you can make arrangements to join your friends. My name is Wright, and I reside but a short distance from this fording place."

"I told you we should meet with some of old Wright's folks," grumbled Bill, who was extended upon the ground, his hands secured behind his back.

"Yes, you scamp, I am 'old Wright,' as you termed me, and believe me, I never felt prouder of the name than at this moment, when I have helped rescue the women from your clutches, and feel that there is a chance of seeing you hanged."

"God be praised," cried Nancy; "we have met with Christians at last. When men speak of the gibbet, I know that they have served the Lord and will fight the devil. To-night you have fought four devils instead of one, and like angels have overcome them."

"Do you hear that, Bill? The old wench calls Wright an angel," exclaimed one of the scamps, turning his head towards his companion as well as he was able.

"If we had him on the mountain we would make an angel of him d——d quick, by singeing off his hair," replied the fellow addressed as Bill.

"Who is the woman by your side?" Mr. Brown asked Nancy.

"Ah, poor thing, she was on her way to the mines with her husband, when these devils set upon us, killed the men, and made us prisoners. If my old man had been there it wouldn't have happened, I know," was Nancy's confident reply.

"Why so?" I asked.

"Because he can lick half a dozen such cowards as these, and one glance of his eye would have been sufficient to have frightened them."

"That is so, Nance," laughed one of the prisoners; "he is frightfully cross-eyed, and as homely as a hedgehog."

"The Lord be thankful for it, for I know that if his eyes are not right his heart is."

"Keep your remarks to yourself," said Mr. Wright, sternly, addressing the prostrate man; but that they had no intention of doing, for, like all desperadoes, they were determined to appear "game" to the last.

"Don't you think, master, dear, that I'd better string 'em on me spear like herring? 'Twould save a dale of trouble," asked Mike.

"That death would be too easy for them. They must die on the gallows," Mr. Wright said, impressively.

"And how do you know which is the easiest, old cock?" demanded Bill. "Was you ever hung for sheep stealing, or skewered for house breaking?"

"Pay no attention to them, sir," Nancy exclaimed. "They are demons from the other world, and will soon be at home."

"Amen," piously ejaculated the ghost.

We managed, after some little persuasion, to get the women upon their feet, and inspire them with energy enough to undertake the journey to the house.

As for the horses and the dead bushranger, we left them at the ford until morning, when Mr. Wright proposed to send men out to bury

"Don't harm her!" exclaimed the younger woman, removing her hands from her face, and endeavoring to shelter the person of her companion; but the bushrangers were regardless of her entreaties, and pushed her aside with rudeness. Page 518.

the me, and secure the others, and, if possible, return them to their owners.

As we walked along, Nancy related to me the adventures which she had encountered since leaving Melbourne. She was an old campaigner in Australia, and was on her way to Tares Creek to join her husband, who had been mining in that location ever since gold was first discovered.

He had intrusted her with a few hundred pounds to visit the city and purchase provisions and articles of daily use sufficient to last them through the wet season, and she had performed her mission, and instead of waiting for one of the regular freighting teams to take her to the creek, she had engaged passage with two miners, one of whom had his wife with him, and who owned a pair of horses and a wagon. Luckily Nancy had left her goods in the city, with orders to forward them by the freight wagons, so that she lost nothing personally, even if the ruffians did search her person, disbelieving her assertion that she was destitute of money and valuables.

The bushrangers had ambushed the party and shot them at their leisure, and did the business as coolly and with as much indifference as though the poor fellows had been sheep, and the ruffians hungry and in want of mutton. They didn't seem to think that they had done a cruel action; and when the younger female, whose name was Betsey Trueman, shed bitter tears at her loss, the brutes jested at her grief, and promised to supply his place with a fresher and more active husband. They couldn't understand why a woman should mourn for one man when there were others ready to take his place.

"The onfeeling wretches," Nancy said, concluding her story, "they had the impudence to put their hands not only in Betsey's pocket, but mine, too. I boxed the puppy's ears, and he had to bear it, although he did draw his knife and threaten to cut me to pieces. I wish that my old man had been there when he made the attempt. He would have broken every bone in his body, and then tore him limb from limb."

"That would have been rather a cruel fate," I remarked, somewhat amused at her eulogistic description of her husband's strength.

"Well, he could do it," was her confident answer, and I have no doubt that she thought so.

We reached the bend of the stream, where we had crossed an hour before, without accident, for the moon was shining full and bright, but when we intimated to our prisoners that it was desirable that they should wade through the water, which already began to subside, they doggedly refused, and all our urging was useless. They feared that we intended to drown them; and even when we sent Kala to the other side of the creek to prove that the water was not deep, they still remained sulky and obstinate.

"Let me argue the point wid 'em," Mike said, appealing to Mr. Wright, who reluctantly gave his consent.

"Step up, ye divils," the Irishman shouted, applying his sharp-pointed spear to the sides of the most obstinate robber.

"Go to the devil, you Irish bogtrotter!" was the reply.

"Did ye hear him, master, dear, call me names? O, that the ruffians

should abuse a dacent lad, who has worked night and day for the parties that he ates, and the meat that he drinks."

"Whiskey, more like," grunted Bill.

"I'll whiskey ye, ye devils; start at once, or by St. Patrick I'll drive ye into the water like the holy man did the toads and snakes—long life to him."

Still the ruffians held back, and swore roundly, that they would not stir, unless carried across the stream; and at this display of obstinacy, Mike lost all mercy.

"Ye won't go, hey?" he shouted, bringing his spear fair against the broadest portion of one of the bushranger's bodies; "of coorse ye won't move, hey?"

As he spoke, he pressed harder and harder, but the ruffian stood his ground remarkably well, although he must have suffered considerably.

"Is that one of the poisoned spear points?" Mr. Brown asked, carelessly.

"Of coorse it is," replied Mike, promptly, seeing the pertinence of the question.

"You Irish thief, do you mean to say that the spear is pisened?" demanded the robber, eagerly.

"Of coorse I do; ye die in less than an hour, unless the pisen is worked out of the wound."

The bushrangers waited to hear no more. They sprang into the creek with wonderful rapidity, and waded across, followed by Mike, who continually threatened them with a repetition of his weapon unless they behaved themselves like dacent lads.

"The spear is not poisoned, I hope," I said to Mr. Wright.

"No, if it had been, I should have objected to its use. The fellows are born to be hanged, so there's no danger of their dying any other way."

As soon as the bushrangers were on the other side, we carried the women across, and then picked our way to the house, tired and sleepy, and extremely desirous of a taste of the punch which we had left behind. Our prisoners no longer objected to obeying Mike's injunctions, and he was quite proud of his authority over them.

Kala, swift of foot, had hastened on in advance of us, and announced our arrival to the inmates of the house, and as we drew near, the laborers flocked towards us with cheers of triumph at our success, and words of scorn for the prisoners.

So much did the men sympathize with the women, that they insisted upon carrying them to the house; and although Nancy kicked and scratched when she found a pair of strong arms around her, she was obliged to succumb, and was ultimately landed in the dining room, half angry, and yet half pleased, at her conveyance.

The noise awakened the parrot, and he added his voice to the general uproar.

"More bushrangers! more bushrangers!" the bird shouted; "I told you so; I see 'em! rascals! rascal! steal sheep, ho, ho!"

"Keep quiet, Poll," said Mr. Wright.

"I won't!" promptly responded Poll; and he was as good as his word, for as long as we talked he would, although sometimes his speeches were not quite apropos while the ladies were present.

"I don't know how you can change your clothes, ladies," Mr. Wright said, seeing that they stood in great need of such an arrangement; "the fact of it is, I never had the fortune to have a wife, so women's garments are unknown in my poor house."

"Give 'em men's," shrieked the parrot; "who cares?"

"The first sensible words that you have spoken to-night, Poll," the master exclaimed.

"Is it?" was the brief ejaculation of the bird, as though inclined to doubt the truth of that remark.

"If you will retire to a room that shall be allotted to you during your stay here, I will provide you with such garments as I have. They are dry and clean, and you can use them until your own are in proper order. No one will notice the change, for, believe me, we all sympathize too deeply in your misfortunes to feel aught but pity."

"As for myself," replied Nancy, promptly, "I shall feel extremely obliged, for I have worn damp garments so long that I am almost like a mermaid. But this poor thing," pointing to Betsey, "only desires to lay her aching head upon a pillow, and forget her misery."

"Haven't got one in the house," promptly responded Poll.

"She needs food. Let her come to the table after you have made such alterations as are necessary."

"So do I," croaked the bird.

"If you will have a cup of tea made, I am confident that it will benefit her more than food. As for myself, I don't fear to confess that I am hungry, and shall eat heartily," Nancy said.

"Of bushrangers?" roared Poll, who seemed to be undecided how to class the ladies of our party, never having seen a woman in that part of the country.

"The tea shall be prepared, and by the time you have changed your clothes supper will be ready. Jackson, give me a candle, and I will show the ladies into the west room, where they can be as secluded as though in their own house;" and it was admirable to see the hearty farmer bow, and precede the females up the wide, hard wood stairs, displaying as much gallantry and care for their comfort as though he was to marry one of them next day.

"Good night, master," shrieked the mischievous bird, bringing a red flush to Mr. Wright's face.

"I'm coming back to punish you for your impudence, sir," our host said, shaking his finger at the bird.

"Don't hurry yourself. D——n bushrangers — where's the d——n bushrangers?" and as Mr. Wright disappeared from view, the bird turned its attention to other topics, and after surveying us with commendable attention, croaked out, —

"Give me bread; Poll's hungry."

"And so am I," Mr. Brown answered, making an attempt to stroke the bird's head, but the familiarity was rebuked by a vigorous peck, that almost started the skin.

"You little devil, what do you mean?" my friend said, almost angry.

"That's right; swear and d——n! Where's the women? I love women! I should like to hug one."

"You vulgar little brute! Where did you learn your bad manners?" I asked.

"Mike, Mike, Mike."

"Well, Mike might be in better business. You have got some queer crotchets in your head that are hardly suitable for a ladies boudoir, especially if she expected gentlemen visitors," and Mr. Brown surveyed the talented bird with considerable admiration, although he kept at a respectful distance.

Jackson now made his appearance, and began to lay the dishes for supper, first driving the laborers into their own sitting room, where they surrounded the bushrangers, and, I am sorry to say, did not treat them exactly as prisoners should have been used.

Left together, Mr. Brown and myself superintended Jackson, and wished for supper, so that we could get a few hours' sleep before daylight.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

Punishing the Bully.

There are moments when the hardest hearts are softened with a feeling akin to pity for criminals; and although I thought that I had got pretty well toughened to all sentiments of the kind, yet I must confess that while I looked at the imprisoned bushrangers, I wished them upon the very summit of Mount Tarrengower, and compelled to remain there amid snow and storm, until all their wickedness was washed away, and their past sins were forgiven.

I was more inclined to feel as I did from the fact that the farm hands were encircling the poor devils, and criticising and abusing them without mercy. I hate to see a fallen enemy ill treated. I always thought that it was more noble to treat a fallen foe with some slight show of respect, but that standard was not thought of by the laborers.

At last, one man, carried away by his feelings, deliberately spat into the face of old Bill, and the act was hailed with shouts of applause and laughter. The bushranger was unable to remove the indignity, and it remained upon his grizzly countenance, a dirty monument of reproach to his tormentors. I saw the old robber's eyes flash fire, and I could imagine his feelings while standing there with bound arms, powerless.

"Can't you interfere, and prevent so disgraceful a recurrence?" I asked of Mr. Brown; but that gentleman thought that it was best to wait until Mr. Wright made his appearance, and get him to check the abuses.

I thought so myself for a few minutes, but when I found that one individual in the crowd was disposed to add cruelty to his insults, I could no longer remain silent.

Mike had told the men the method which he took to get the bushrangers to cross the creek, and now one fellow, whom I noticed was foremost in the disgraceful proceedings, was testing the most tender portion of their bodies by the aid of a sharp-pointed knife; and al-

though the robbers uttered no complaints or groans, I saw that they were suffering, and that it was time to interfere.

"These men are prisoners," I said, urging my way through the crowd until I stood before the robbers and their tormentors. "Let them receive good treatment, for we may desire it ourselves some day."

The laborer whom I addressed paid not the slightest attention to my words, but continued to prick the prisoners with his knife as if he enjoyed it. Old Bill had uttered a few savage oaths in remonstrance, but they were unheeded.

"Excuse me for interfering in your sport, my man," I continued, laying one hand on his shoulder, "but you will gratify me if you desist."

"What is it to you?" he demanded, rudely; and I noticed that there was an uncommon stillness in the room, and many anxious glances were cast towards me, which convinced me that I was dealing with the bully of the farm, and a man whom they all feared, and I fancied disliked.

"Excuse me for interrupting you, but I think that I have a right to. I assisted to capture the men, and therefore have a voice in relation to their disposal."

I was perfectly cool and collected while speaking, for I did not intend that the fellow should get the advantage of me by displaying passion.

"Your voice is of no account here in this house, so you will just take yourself off, and go to the devil, if you wish."

"I have no desire to see your relations, so I shall do no such thing. I have a right to be in the house, and I have authority to ask you to desist from ill treating these men. If you do not, I shall ——"

"What?" the bully asked, thrusting his face close to mine, and leering most insultingly.

"Make you," I answered, decidedly.

"You will?" he demanded, with a malignant look.

"I shall do my best," I replied.

The bully did not utter a word in reply, but he put the point of his knife to a bushranger's arm, and pressed so hard that the prisoner uttered a half suppressed cry of pain.

"You see!" the fellow exclaimed, turning to me. "Now, what are you going to do about it?"

I saw that Mr. Brown and every person in the room were watching my motions with considerable curiosity, and that I should be disgraced if I retreated from my unpleasant position. The quarrel was not serious enough to use my weapons, although I was not blind to the fact that the bully had a knife in his hand, and looked like a fellow who would not scruple to use it.

There was but one course for me to pursue — so, no sooner had he proposed his question than I raised my arm, and struck him a blow between his eyes that caused a stream of claret to spurt out, and sent the bully reeling backwards to the further end of the room.

"Good!" cried a dozen voices, and I heard Mr. Brown's deep bass foremost in the exclamation.

"Take care," shouted the crowd; "he's got a knife, and will use it."

The warning came none too soon, for suddenly the crowd opened to the right and left, and I caught sight of the bully, with bloody face and inflamed eyes, rushing towards me.

There was no time to draw my revolver, or even my knife, for before I could lay my hand upon either the fellow was within three feet of me, with uplifted hand. I stood firm, and when I saw the weapon descending, like lightning I sprang aside. The point of the knife touched the barrel of my pistol, glanced aside, and such was the force of the blow that the ruffian fell to the floor, completely at my mercy.

"You would, would ye?" I heard Mike shout, as the bully struggled to regain his feet. "Take that, for a bad man that ye are."

The Irishman, as he spoke, snatched a boomerang from Kala's hand and struck the fallen man a blow upon his head that I thought had crushed his skull.

"Served him right!" I heard the laborers say, who, now that their companion was beaten, could afford to give some expression of their opinion.

"The d——d blackguard! he not only insults our guests, but must pick on prisoners he never dared to face. O, the spalpeen, I've a good mind to fetch him another winder," and Mike raised his weapon as if to do so, but I stayed his hand, for the bully appeared to be really suffering, and groaned as though his head ached.

"What is the cause of this disturbance?" I heard Mr. Wright ask, while endeavoring to persuade Mike to remain quiet.

"Faith, the cause of it was insolence, and right well has it been punished," replied Mr. Brown. "But come into the other room, and I'll tell you the whole story."

Our host followed the ex-inspector to the room where we had supped, while I left the now quiet crowd as soon as possible, and passed out of doors with Mike at my heels.

"It's close to your heart he struck," said Mike, alluding to the blow of the knife. "An inch would have been the death of ye. Long life to ye."

"I have to thank you for your efforts in my behalf," I replied, and when I shook his hand I left a gold piece in it.

"Bedad, if ye wish, I'll go back and give 'um another lick," Mike exclaimed, with enthusiasm, when he felt the weight of the coin.

Before I could reply, Mr. Wright left the house, and hurried towards us.

"Let me, in the first place, apologize for the rudeness of my servant, and, in the second place, thank you for punishing him as he deserves. Mr. Brown has given me a very impartial account of the affair."

"And did he tell what I did, bedad," cried Mike.

"Yes, I am glad to think there is one man in my employ who knows how to back my friends when I am absent. Mike, from this night your wages are raised one pound per month, and you shall have Kelly's place, whom I intend to discharge."

This news excited all the Irishman's enthusiasm, and we left him bidding defiance to the moon, and wondering how he should spend all his money.

"The fellow whom you punished for insolence, has long held the position of a bully," Mr. Wright said, "owing to his quarrelsome disposition, and readiness to use a knife on slight occasion. I have overlooked several faults in hope that he would improve in disposition, but

I see that my leniency is lost, and as soon as his head is healed, he goes to Melbourne."

I begged him not to discharge the man on my account, but Mr. Wright was firm and obstinate as any Englishman, when once resolved on a project, so I let the matter drop, and when we reached the house, Jackson informed us that our second supper was ready, and that Nancy was impatient for something to eat.

"Where have you two men been wandering?" cried Mr. Brown, who was pacing the room like a hungry bear. "Supper has been ready ten minutes; a long time for famished people to wait."

We did not waste precious time in excuses, for it was near three o'clock in the morning, and I felt anxious to finish, and get that rest which I so much needed.

"Let the men close the doors and windows, and set a guard over our prisoners," Mr. Wright said, addressing Jackson, who stood in readiness to attend to our wants.

"And one more request," my friend said, as we took our seats at the table, "when we once get to sleep, be kind enough to let us rest until we wake of our own accord. For the past three days our naps have not been very long or sound."

"Every thing shall be as you desire, gentlemen. Now fall to, and don't forget that there is a lady present."

Unless our host had alluded to the fact, it is probable that we should have forgotten it, for Nancy was so well disguised in men's apparel that she looked like a respectable farmer.

She seemed perfectly cool and unconcerned, and I was not surprised to hear her say that she had passed many months so disguised while mining with her husband at Bendigo, Tarres Creek, and Ballarat, during the early history of the mines, when it was neither safe nor agreeable to have a woman in camp. Tired as we were, she related a few incidents connected with her life that were listened to with much interest, and we found that if Nancy was rough, she possessed a true heart and a Christian spirit, and was never backward in extending aid to the sick, or giving good advice to the profane.

"Smoke your pipes, gentlemen," she said, "and don't be afraid that I shall be sick, or that the smoke will injure my complexion. My old man has used a pipe these twenty-five years, and I hope that he will live twenty-five more, and as much longer as the Lord is willing. I don't think that using a pipe will shorten his days or his nights. When I see him, after a hard day's work, sucking a yard of clay, I thank Heaven that it ain't a whiskey bottle. It's but little comfort the poor fellow gets in this country, and if he's contented I'm happy."

"I wish that I could find a wife with your sentiments," Mr. Wright remarked.

"So you can," Nancy replied; "but you've got to search for 'em. They ain't found out here on the sand plains, or in the mines, but beneath the shelter of a parent's protection in the large cities, where education and virtue are taught."

"If you speak of Melbourne," Mr. Brown said, with an incredulous shrug of his shoulders, "I shall be inclined to doubt you, for in the city no such word as virtue is known."

"Spoken like a man of the world, and without a thought of how much that is good and true is placed upon a level with the vile and unworthy. For shame, gentlemen, and brave men as I know you are, to utter such slanders concerning the weaker sex. Remember that your mothers were women, and if aught was spoken against them, would not your blood tingle?"

Mr. Brown did not jest again that night, and I think that the reply made us all reflect upon our obligations to our Maker, for we pushed back our chairs from the table, and declared that sleeping was better than drinking, and that we would finish the punch some other time.

Jackson led the way to our room, while our host did the honors for his lady guests. We bade all good night, and after Mr. Brown and myself had exchanged a few words relative to the incidents of the day, we threw ourselves upon the mattresses spread upon the floor, and just as daylight began to glimmer in the east we fell asleep, and our slumbers were undisturbed for many hours; but at length we were awakened by Mr. Wright, who sat in the only chair the room afforded, smoking his pipe with great apparent relish, and looking as though he had been awake since sunrise.

"Come, rouse up," he said, "or you will have no appetite for supper. You are the soundest sleepers that I ever saw, for I made some noise in hopes of awakening you, but I found that was an impossibility, so I thought I would try tobacco smoke."

"What o'clock is it?" I asked, rubbing my eyes, and trying to think where I was.

"Near four. Come, get up, and help me entertain the women. They have got their proper clothes on, and don't look so bad as they might. The young one still wails for her husband, although I tell her to keep up her spirits, and think of something else."

"Advice which she is certain not to follow. Did you ever know of a woman that would be advised under any circumstances? No, I thought not."

"You are always grumbling about the women," I said, addressing Mr. Brown. "If the truth was known, I suppose that it would show that you have been jilted some day by a female with a pretty face, and revenge yourself by abusing the whole sex. That is ungallant."

"I don't care how ungallant it is, for I know it to be true," replied Mr. Brown, with great candor; "ten years ago, I made love to the prettiest piece of flesh and blood that ever walked on two legs, or allowed her hair to curl in ringlets. But I don't like to talk on the subject."

"A truce to your love affairs," interrupted Mr. Wright; "come and take a gallop with me this afternoon, and have a look at my farm, and I'll warrant that you will think no more of women or of marriage. Will you come?"

We both readily assented, and a good cup of coffee, which Jackson had kept in readiness for us when we awoke, was swallowed with a relish, and then we found our horses standing at the door, looking in prime order, in spite of certain places on their coats which had been singed while riding through the fire the day before.

Mr. Wright had been very attentive to our comforts, for the saddles

were repaired and made smooth where they were rough, and the bridles were oiled and cleaned, and looked like new ones. We mounted, and turning our horses' heads, trotted slowly towards the field of wheat, which we had passed the first day of our arrival.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

Mr. Wright's Farm. — Death of Kelly.

A pleasant ride we had that afternoon, reviewing flocks and growing crops, and discoursing on the best mode of cultivation. I found that our host preferred the heavy tools of English farmers, to the light, easily managed instruments of the Americans, and I took occasion to point out the superior advantages which the latter possessed; but Mr. Wright was incredulous, and suspicious of my innovations. His land was level, and free from stones, and just suited for light American ploughs, and I pledged my word that a third more work could be done with one, drawn by a yoke of oxen, than could be performed by an English made plough, a huge, clumsy thing, drawn by two span of horses, and requiring three men to attend upon its wants.

I exacted a promise from Mr. Wright, that he would give an American plough a fair trial; and the next time he visited Melbourne he purchased one, and I had the satisfaction, before I left the country, of hearing him say that he was delighted with its performance, and that he had discarded many English farming tools, and substituted American, which were lighter, yet quite strong enough, and saved much labor.

If I had accomplished no other result in Australia than introducing a few articles of the manufacture of the United States, I should think that I was amply compensated for my trouble, convinced as I am, that we have found a market that will consume thousands of dollars worth of agricultural tools, and be paid for in clean gold dust.

Mr. Wright owned fifty thousand acres of land, — not one thousand, but *fifty* thousand, — and over two thirds of it were devoted to grazing purposes.

For instance, he had five hundred acres sowed to wheat, five hundred to potatoes, and a thousand acres to vegetables, fruits, and oats. The rest of the vast domain was free to the immense herds which were seen scattered over the plains in all directions.

There were ten thousand head of sheep, three thousand head of cattle, and five hundred horses on the farm, and all owned by one man, and that man's wealth increasing every year to an almost fabulous extent. He pointed out the site which he had selected for building an immense barn, to be used for the storage of grain, and to keep a number of his most highly prized horses in during the winter season, and then spoke of the time when the country would be so secure that he could erect a house more in accordance with his ideas of comfort and

good taste, and lie down at night and be certain of awaking in the morning and find his herds safe.

The ride and the farmer's conversation were most interesting to me; but I will not inflict it upon the readers, for it is probable that they do not take that interest in agriculture that I do. We returned to the house, and I was more than ever profoundly impressed with the magnitude of Australian farmers' operations.

That evening, while sipping our punch, we hinted that the next morning must see us on our way to Ballarat. Mr. Wright vainly urged us to remain with him for a week, and even offered the inducement of a formidable expedition against the bushrangers in the vicinity of Mount Tarrengower; but we turned deaf ears to the allurements, and promised at some future day to visit him, when our time would not be limited.

We had been absent from the mines a week, and unsettled as affairs were when we left, we knew not what great events had happened. I had considerable property that required looking after, and I supposed Fred would need assistance and advice in case there was a rising of the miners in opposition to the tax, which had for such a length of time caused fierce dissensions and a few bloody collisions.

"But what am I to do with my prisoners?" Mr. Wright asked, with a perplexed look.

"Iron them securely, and send them to Melbourne, under an escort of your most trusty men," replied Mr. Brown.

"Yes, I can do that, but there's the other party — the women. What can I do with them after you are gone?"

"Send them to Melbourne also. They will be needed as witnesses, and will be well cared for during their stay. After the men are hanged they can go where they please. That's the only course that is left for you to pursue."

"I will leave a note for the ladies with the lieutenant of police in Melbourne, and he will see that they are properly cared for," I remarked.

"Perhaps you had better give it to me," Mr. Wright said, thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"Because I think that business will call me to the city in a day or two, and I will accompany the expedition, and see that the women have all that they desire on the route. I don't like to trust them with my men, for I don't know how the latter would act when no longer under my supervision."

"The very best course you can take," cried Mr. Brown and myself in a breath, glad to think that the ladies were to be well protected.

"If you think that plan is a good one, I shall adopt it," Mr. Wright remarked, a little confused, although I didn't suspect at the time that the youth and tears of the widow had made an impression upon his heart, and that he desired to be as near her as possible, so as to condole with her on her misfortunes.

We settled the business that evening, and I even made an arrangement with Mr. Wright to forward me all his surplus produce, such as vegetables and fruit, and all the cattle he desired to dispose of. I

pointed out the advantage he would derive from the trade, and that, instead of sending his stock to Melbourne, and waiting for consignees to dispose of it, I would pay upon delivery, and give the best market price. He agreed with me, and we closed a bargain that was only interrupted when Fred and myself left the country.

The next morning we were up at daylight, and so were the whole household. Breakfast was smoking on the table when we descended to the first floor, and Jackson stood near the door looking quite melancholy at the prospect of our departure, while Kala and Iala ventured as near the dining room as they dared for the purpose of reminding us of our promised bottles of rum, and tobacco. We satisfied them that they were not forgotten, and that they should receive the articles by the first team that was consigned to us from the farm.

"And me, sir," whispered Jackson; "I hope that I shall not be forgotten after your departure."

"We never forget our promises," I replied. "You shall have a pardon, if money or influence can procure one."

With this assurance he was perfectly satisfied, and I may as well state here that he was pardoned in less than a year from the time of our visit, and that he left Mr. Wright's employ, went to Melbourne with a hundred pounds in his pocket, commenced a small business, which gradually expanded, until at the present time he writes me that he is assessed for near one hundred thousand pounds. He has been fortunate in all his speculations, and is regarded as one of the most honorable merchants in Melbourne.

"By the way, that fellow whom you quarrelled with and struck has left my employ," Mr. Wright said, as we took our seats at the table.

"He took a sudden start," I replied.

"Yes, he gave me no intimation of his leaving; if he had, I would have settled with him in full, and discharged him in regular form. He went off in the course of the night, and has taken all that he owned and something over. He will turn out a bushranger yet, or I'm no reader of faces."

"What has he carried off that didn't belong to him?" Mr. Brown asked.

"A pair of large sized pistols, and a lot of ammunition."

"You can afford to lose them, for they are more dangerous to the man who fires them than the one who stands before them. Congratulate yourself on their loss. It is your gain."

Our host laughed, but denied the truth of my assertion, and during the remaining time we were at the table the subject was not again alluded to.

We finished our breakfast, received our gold from Mr. Wright, who had locked it in his safe during our stay, and had not asked us a single question concerning it, although I have no doubt that he suspected the truth — shook hands with the men, and received the blessings of Nancy, and the tearful adieus of Betsy — held a short interview with the ghost, who was inclined to shed tears because he could not accompany us, but who was consoled when we promised to get him pardoned, and to send him a present of tobacco, and brandy enough to last a twelvemonth — had another hand-shake all round, and then we mounted our

horses, and with three ringing cheers in our ears we started on our journey towards Ballarat.

"A pleasant visit we have had," muttered Mr. Brown, after we were out of sight of the house. "Faith, I would have no objection to owning a farm like this."

"Which you would sell in less than a year at a sacrifice."

"No, I don't think so. But, hullo! we've forgotten something."

'Well, what is it?"

"Why, something to eat on the route."

"Jackson has looked to our welfare, and if you will examine the bundle strapped to the back part of your saddle you will find a choice collection of eatables, and a large flask of something stronger than water. You see that I am provided in the same manner."

"I am thankful for it, and sincerely hope that you will make no demands upon me during the journey."

"Don't alarm yourself," I replied, laughing. "I have got a revolver, and can shoot a kangaroo if I get hungry."

By chance I drew my revolver from my belt as I spoke, and saw that it was apparently in good order, although I thought that the caps looked as though they had been put on in a bungling manner. The work did not look like mine, and I had a faint suspicion that the pistol had been tampered with.

I said nothing to my friend, but dropped the rein upon my horse's neck, and removed one of the caps of the nipple. I saw nothing to alarm me until I had wiped away the corrosive substance that clung to the iron, when, to my surprise, I discovered that a small plug had been driven into the priming tube, thus rendering the charge in the barrel useless. The discovery was valuable, for I did not know what designs the man who did the work might have on us.

A brief inspection convinced me that the remaining five tubes were in the same condition, and then I called for a halt.

"What's the matter now?" demanded my friend, who was considerable in advance of me.

"A slight discovery that may prove of value."

"What is it — another bottle of liquor?"

"No, of more importance than that. Had it been a bottle I should have hardly called you back," I replied.

"No, I'll be sworn that you would not. But go on. Tell me what you have found out now."

"Simply that our pistols have been tampered with. At least mine has."

"Is it possible?" cried Mr. Brown, hastily, drawing his weapon and inspecting it.

"I see nothing," he continued. "The powder and ball seem to be in their places, and the caps on."

"Take off the caps, and then see," I remarked.

He did as I requested, and found the tubes stopped as mine were.

"The devil!" he muttered; "I don't like this much."

"Neither do I; but we must make the best of it. The quicker we extract the plugs, the more safe I shall feel."

The task was a long one, but we accomplished it, and then, to make all sure, we reloaded our weapons, and felt relieved when we found that we could depend upon them.

"When was this done?" Mr. Brown inquired.

"Probably yesterday afternoon, while we were looking over the farm."

"But who could have done it?"

"There you ask me too much. It may have been known to the farm hands that we had money on our persons. Indeed, I think that the shepherd, while in his cups, boasted of the rich booty which we had found, and so excited the envious spirit of some reckless fellow who wishes to be rich at our expense."

"Then we must have the satisfaction of riding along, anticipating a bullet every few minutes," grumbled Mr. Brown.

"I suppose that is the case, unless we change our route."

"And go thirty miles out of our way?" exclaimed my companion, sneeringly. "No, sir. I have no desire to cross a sandy plain where the sun heats the earth so hot that a mosquito gets its wings singed if it alights before twelve o'clock at night."

"The plain must be a paradise if insects don't exist there. Let us go by that route," I replied.

"I didn't say that flies and mosquitoes were not there. I said that they didn't touch the sand, but they hover in the air, and unfortunate is the man or beast that they light upon."

I found out that Mr. Brown was not to be changed from his purpose; so we once more rode on side by side, and while we were chatting upon the incidents that had befallen us during our excursion, we almost forgot the plugging of the pistols.

At the edge of Mr. Wright's land, on the route to Ballarat, was a small forest of gum trees, through which ran a small stream, similar to the one that we crossed on the night that we captured the bushrangers. The water was shallow and sluggish, with a soft, sticky bottom, and boggy sides. This stream Mr. Wright had told us we should have to cross, and that after we were over we could soon find the numerous trails and roads leading to the mines, and probably meet with parties of miners.

When the directions were given a number of the farm hands were present, so that I arrived at the conclusion that while we were fording the stream an attempt would be made upon our lives, if it was to be made at all.

As soon, therefore, as we arrived in the vicinity of the brook I checked the pace of my horse, and carefully scrutinized the trees and places where an ambush might be expected.

I even examined the ground for the prints of horses' feet, for I knew that it was customary for every runaway servant or farm hand to steal a horse.

That was considered a matter of course, and it was no unusual thing for the police of Australia, when they saw a poorly-clad man on horseback, to ask him where he stole it; and unless he gave pretty correct answers, the animal would be taken away and confiscated to the services of the force.

I could tell nothing by the earth, for the cattle had resorted to the brook to quench their thirst, and roll in the cool mud.

I glanced hastily around, but saw nothing to excite alarm; so I touched my horse lightly and entered the brook. The animal, disliking the mud, sprang suddenly half way across. The quick motion of the brute probably saved my life, for just as the animal sprang a shot was fired, and the ball whizzed in uncomfortable proximity to my head.

I struck the spurs deeply into the brute's sides, and with a bound like lightning, he landed me on the bank of the stream; but as he did so, the soil yielded, and he fell, throwing me several feet from him.

Again was I indebted for my life to that simple accident, and it was of a kind that had not occurred before during my residence in Australia, for just as the horse fell, another sharp report of firearms was heard, and a bullet struck the trunk of a tree over my head, and sent a shower of bark rattling upon my face.

"I see the d——d scoundrel!" shouted Mr. Brown, and he spurred in pursuit. I saw the form of a stout-built man, mounted on a powerful horse, disappear amid the trees, and I quickly urged my animal to his feet, so that I could join in the pursuit.

Before it could be done, I heard two quick, ringing shots, which my ears told me came from Mr. Brown's revolver, and I easily guessed the fate of the would-be assassin.

By the time I had scraped the mud from my person, Mr. Brown came riding slowly back, looking as unconcerned and calm as possible.

"Did you hit him?" I asked.

"To be sure; both shots told," was the satisfactory reply.

"Who was the scamp? Did you recognize him?"

"Certainly; I could hardly fail to do that, when he bore your mark."

"How — my mark?" I asked in astonishment.

"Yes; one of his eyes was black and blue, where you struck him last night."

"You mean to tell me that it was Kelly who sought my life?" I cried, recollecting that Mr. Wright had informed me that the fellow had left the farm the night before.

"If you don't believe it, you will find the body a few rods from here with two wounds — one on the right shoulder and the second through the body."

"I have no desire to see it," I replied; "let us continue our journey, and leave the scene of so disagreeable a necessity."

If Mr. Brown did not utter a prayer of thanksgiving for his escape, I am certain that I did; and it was a sincere one at that, for nothing but an overruling Providence could have saved one from the effects of two shots at a short distance.

On we pressed, our good horses exerting themselves to the utmost, and almost regardless of the heat which poured down upon our heads, until our brains seemed melted, and ready to run from the eyes. Profuse drinking alone saved us from a sun-stroke that day.

At length we reached the plain, and saw stretched before us half a dozen roads, all leading to the mines, but all deserted, for it was at an hour when few travellers cared to move, preferring to wait until the sun had ceased its fiery course, and the earth had thrown off its fervent heat.

"I go no farther," I exclaimed, as I saw that my horse was suffering from his over-exertions.

Mr. Brown reined in, and seemed disposed to take advice.

"Only to the next clump of trees," he replied, pointing to half a dozen, about a mile distant.

"We shall kill the animals, and ourselves in the bargain," I replied.

"A mile or so will make but little difference; I think that I can promise you a good camping ground, and a sink hole with pretty fresh water under those trees; come."

I could no longer resist the inducements, and once more we put our horses in motion.

"See, as I told you, we shall find company under the trees!" cried Mr. Brown; "there is smoke arising, and that denotes coffee and supper. Cheer up, and we shall yet learn the news before sunset."

A few minutes revealed to our gaze three or four men and two women, seated near a wagon, that looked as though it had made many journeys between Ballarat and Melbourne, before the roads were in good order. A brisk fire was burning, and on that fire we could see a coffee-pot and a kettle. A short distance from the camp were two skeleton horses, with just life enough left to be able to graze upon the prairie, and who seemed to have been fed on thistles during the last few years of their life. With no suspicion that our appearance was against us, we rode boldly on until we were brought to a halt by a couple of presented muskets, held in the hands of their trembling owners.

"Don't ye come here, ye divils!" shouted one of the men in goodly strong brogue.

"If ye does, it's cowld lead ye'll get!" cried another.

"But, my good friends," Mr. Brown said, blandly.

"Away wid ye, at once, and the divil take care of ye. We know ye."

"If you know us, you should not fear us," my friend said, in the insinuating argumentative style so peculiar to him.

"O! betther not stand there blarneying, but go away wid ye!" yelled out one of the women, with demonstrative indications of throwing hot water or potatoes at us.

"Why, who do you think we are?" I asked, Mr. Brown having retired from the conversational portion of his duty in deep disgust at the idea of having his gentlemanly address taken for blarney.

"We think ye are thaves! may the divil confound ye," replied one of the heathen.

"But we are not thieves," I continued.

"Thin yer looks belies ye wonderfully. Go on yer ways, and don't stop here thinking that we've money, or any stuff to stale, for we ain't."

"Why, you d——n fools!" yelled Mr. Brown, "we have more money in our pockets than the carcasses of yourselves, wives, and horses would bring."

This announcement produced a sensation, and we were happy to see the fellows whisper together, as though they had made a mistake, and were willing to rectify it.

"Have ye whiskey?" at length one of them asked.

I shook a bottle in their faces, but made no reply.

"Is it the rale poteen?" he demanded.

"Irish all over," I answered.

"Thin glory to God, come along and welcome."

The muskets were lowered, the hostile attitude ceased, and we rode into the camp like conquerors, and were received with every mark of respect, which I attributed more to the influence of the black bottle that I held in my hand, than to our dignified personal appearance. Even the women condescended to welcome us with looks of encouragement, and one of them spanked her baby when it cried, because the wee thing was frightened at strangers.

CHAPTER LXXX.

Journey back to Ballarat.

"You are, no doubt, strangers in the country?" said Mr. Brown, after we had removed the saddles from our horses' backs, and suffered the animals to roam a short distance from the camp for food.

"Faith, ye may well say that," cried the leading Hibernian, with a good-natured smile.

"Where did you come from?" my friend continued.

"Ireland, sir," was the prompt reply.

"I know that without your telling me. I mean from what part of this country. Sydney or Melbourne?"

"Faith, how did ye know we come from Ireland?" queried Pat, with innocent simplicity.

"By your brogue, to be sure," was Mr. Brown's prompt answer.

"Bedad, I never thought of that," grunted the Celt.

"We came from Melbourne, sir," one of the men said, answering Mr. Brown's question, and casting wishful eyes towards the black bottle. "We've been four days on the road, and it's little progress we make at all, bad luck to the horses that won't draw when we want 'em to. It's out of whiskey we got the first day, owing to the swilling of Ned Mulloon, who was drunk as a baste when we left town."

"Faith, it's little chance I had while yer mouth was doing its work, Teddy," cried Ned, with a grin.

"We will make a bargain with you," Mr. Brown said to the men. "Give us a share of your potatoes, and we'll divide the whiskey."

"Done," cried all hands, with remarkable unanimity; and the pot containing the esculents was jerked off the fire and placed at our feet, while we treated all hands, not even excepting the women.

"Well, what is the news at Melbourne?" asked Mr. Brown, while we were satisfying our appetites.

"It's loud talk they have about the miners, and their dislike to pay the tax, glory to God; and the artillerymen were getting ready to march whenever the governor tells 'em to, bad luck to 'em."

"Did you understand at what mines the soldiers are to be stationed?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," replied our informant. "'Tis at Ballarat."

"Then there must have been trouble since our absence," remarked Mr. Brown; "and the sooner we are home the safer will our property be. If we but had fresh horses we could start at once."

"And carry off the whiskey?" demanded the men, with rueful looks.

"No, we would leave it for your use."

"Then long life to yez, and it's prayers ye shall have for fresh horses without delay."

Pat's prayers, if indeed he prayed at all, were of but little avail, for the fresh horses did not come along, and we were compelled to remain inactive until near midnight, when we again saddled our animals, and bade our entertainers farewell. When we left, the company was very patriotic, and songs of Ireland's greatness and England's outrages were hooted loud enough to awaken every one within a radius of two miles. They gave us three cheers when we left, and one of the party, in the excitement, stumbled over the potato pot, and got a dose of hot water on his person that caused him to utter the most frightful cries, which were responded to by shouts of laughter instead of tears of condolement.

"We have accomplished one humane purpose in giving the men the whiskey," Mr. Brown said, as we rode in the direction of Ballarat. "The poor horses will get a few hours' extra rest."

"That is more than the women and children can do," I remarked.

"The women can take care of themselves, I'll warrant you, and if a fight occurs, look after their children at the same time. But touch up your horse. We must reach Ballarat by daylight, for I have no doubt that stirring times are occurring there."

The air was quite cool, and the moon sufficiently bright to show us the right road, so that we wasted no time in searching for it. Not a single person did we meet until just before daylight, when our horses suddenly shied, and an examination revealed the cause. Under a tree by the roadside was a team, and the driver fast asleep, snoring most unmusically, while the oxen were quietly chewing their cuds, chained to a wheel of the cart.

"Let us rouse him, and find out the news from Ballarat," Mr. Brown said.

I made no opposition. My friend approached the sleeping man, and touching him lightly on the shoulder, caused him to look up. The fellow rubbed his eyes, and stared wildly at us for a moment, and then began to beg most piteously.

"I haven't got a single thing about me that's worth stealing," he cried. "If you want my blanket you can have it, but it ain't a very good one."

"I suppose that you take us for bushrangers?" quietly remarked Mr. Brown.

"I certainly do — ain't you?" asked the man, between hope and fear.

"Not quite so far gone as that. All that we desire of you is news, and that you can soon give us without much sacrifice."

"O, is that all? I thought that somebody had been blowing on me," cried the teamster, considerably relieved.

"How are matters at Ballarat?" I demanded.

"Bad as bad can be," replied the stranger promptly. "The devil has taken possession of the miners, and they refuse to pay gold taxes to the government. The latter don't want to yield, and there will be a fight or I'm much mistaken. I don't want to hurry you, but if you want to be counted in, you'd better be moving, or the whole matter will be decided before you arrive."

"I'll bet a wager that you are a Yankee," Mr. Brown remarked, and I thought I detected the man's cuteness before my friend spoke.

"I take the bet," was the prompt reply. "Put the money in my hands."

Mr. Brown's money was not forthcoming, at which the stranger sneered.

"I s'posed that I had picked up a man who wanted a chance to make a few dimes, but you don't seem inclined to come to time. Here's my specie, and there's more where that came from."

"Never mind the wager," I said; "you don't belong to the New England States, I'll take my oath, so you can't catch us in that trap."

"That's so," replied the teamster, with a chuckle; "but what makes you think so?"

"In the first place, you haven't the accent of a genuine Yankee," I replied; "and in the next place, a Yankee would not have exposed a single dollar until he was certain of the company that he was in. Am I right?"

"Hang me if you ain't, stranger," cried the teamster, in a burst of generous enthusiasm. "If you ain't a Yankee, there ain't one in the country."

I pleaded guilty to the charge, and got a warm shake of the hand for my nationality's sake.

"I ain't a Yankee, that's a fact," my new acquaintance said; "but I belong to Yankee land, and that's honor enough, by thunder. I'm an Ohio boy, and just looking round the world to see how it's made afore I settle on dad's farm, and tie up for life. If I can pick up a few dimes afore I go back so much the better, and if I don't it won't break my heart."

We talked with our new acquaintance for near half an hour for the purpose of breathing our horses, and picking up all the news that had transpired during our absence. I gave him some good advice, and informed him that sleeping in his cart while travelling was not the safest plan that he could adopt, and after a few moments' reasoning he seemed to think so himself. We bade him good night, and resumed our journey, and just as day was breaking we drew up our tired horses before the store, which looked unchanged since our absence. All was quiet and still in the neighborhood, but we observed that an unusually large number of police were on duty in the streets, and that many of them were strangers, and eyed us with suspicious looks, as though not certain which party we belonged to.

"I'll hold the horses while you rap Fred up," Mr. Brown said, dismounting.

I was too impatient to see my friend to need a second bidding. I applied my foot to the door, and gave a thundering kick, that made two or three suspicious policemen, who had followed us closely, imagine we were starving for something to eat.

Hardly had I touched the door, when a hoarse growl showed me that Rover was still alive and capable of doing active duty. I heard the hound spring from his sleeping place, cross the floor, and throw his solid form against the door with a subdued yell, which, after a moment's snuffing changed from rage to joy. He uttered cry after cry of welcome, yet still Fred did not seem to take the hint. At length I heard him shuffling along the floor in his slippers, and presently he inquired, —

"Who's there?"

"A friend," I replied, disguising my voice as much as possible.

"What is wanting?" he asked.

"A cup of coffee and something to eat," I replied.

"You can get neither here. Go to one of the coffee-houses."

"But suppose we want to trade?" I asked.

"Then come during trading hours," was the brief rejoinder.

"O, don't stand there talking all day, but let us in," cried Mr. Brown, who, like all Englishmen, couldn't bear to joke on an empty stomach.

"Is that you, Jack?" Fred demanded, eagerly.

"Of course it is," cried Mr. Brown, impatiently.

The heavy bar was removed with remarkable rapidity, and the next instant the door was thrown open, and the best friend that I possessed in the world was shaking my hand and patting me on the back, as though I was an infant strangling with lacteal fluid, while Rover circled around us, and made the air vocal with his joyous barks, until anxious to distinguish himself, and perhaps thinking that Mr. Brown was not getting his share of the reception, he suddenly welcomed that gentleman with a slight nip on the seat of his pantaloons, that caused him to utter a fierce oath, and to rub the place with remarkable vigor.

"Come in, come in," cried Fred, "or we shall have all the green police of Ballarat around us, thinking a manifestation is going on. I see three of the fellows peering around corners as though uncertain whether to regard us as madmen or conspirators."

We followed him into the store and closed the door; and while Fred was busy in lighting lamps, for the store was dark inside, he chatted as though his tongue had had a fast for a month, and was now making up for lost time.

"I had near about given you up for dead, and next week should have left the store in charge of Smith and started in search of you. What detained you so long, and couldn't you send me a few words?"

Then, not waiting for us to answer, he continued: —

"I began to think that you had fallen victims to the bushrangers, for they are very bold lately, and more than one gang has ventured near the city with impunity, while the troubles are continuing. The commissioner has been asked to despatch a force against them, but he has declined, on the ground that he can't spare the men."

"Then troubles continue to exist?" I asked.

"Never more serious than at present; and I expect that open war will be declared every day. The miners have flatly refused to pay their thirty shillings per month for mining, and government insists that they shall. Neither party feel like retreating from its position, although I candidly believe that if a good man was at the head of affairs this difficulty would be settled in twenty-four hours, and in a way satisfactory to the government and the miners."

Even while Fred was entertaining us with news he was busily engaged in starting a fire in the stove for the purpose of preparing our breakfast.

"It is too late to hope to escape bloodshed," Fred continued, "unless concessions are made on the part of the government, which are not looked for. I am informed that the commissioner sends despatches to the governor-general every day, in which he represents the miners as on the point of yielding, and that energy and firmness are alone required to subdue them to his wishes, and prevent further outbreaks. You see how shamefully he is misleading the government, for there are not two hundred men in Ballarat, exclusive of the police force, but who will fight against the tax."

"How is it known that the commissioner sends such despatches?" I asked.

"Why, to tell you the truth," said Fred, sinking his voice to a whisper, "a party of men ambushed the courier day before yesterday, and rifled his despatches. The letters contained a request for more men and plenty of ammunition, and a hope to have the rebels suing for mercy in less than two weeks."

"And how are our countrymen acting?" I asked.

"They are not so backward as I could wish," replied Fred; "for they should remember that we are on a foreign soil, and that an active part is not required of us. But few can withstand the flattery that has been brought to bear upon them, and as a general thing they are all arrayed with the miners. Their rifles are wanted, and dreadful havoc they will make if blows are exchanged."

"And you have taken no part in the question as yet?" Mr. Brown asked.

"No; although offers in abundance have been made by government agents and the leaders in the revolutionary movement. We have too many thousand dollars at stake to trifle with public affairs, although if ——"

Fred paused while pouring out the coffee, and looked hard at Mr. Brown.

"Go on," said that gentleman. "Treat me as though I was a countryman and a brother."

"If the people were about to enter upon a struggle for liberty and independence, I would not mind sacrificing all the property that I possess to help secure so desirable a blessing. But the word liberty is never mentioned. It is only a question of money, and therefore I shall stand aloof."

"By the way, how has business been while we were absent?" I asked.

"Never better. The sales have been large and the profits good. We are out of many things, but Smith should be along this afternoon, and he will supply the deficiency. Now tell me of your trip. Of course you didn't find the buried treasure, and you have returned a little poorer than when you went away."

"That depends upon the estimation in which you hold this kind of coin," I replied, emptying my pockets upon the table, and throwing down a good sized bag of gold dust.

Fred opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have been successful?" he asked.

"As far as getting the gold is concerned we have; but if you ask us if we have had smooth sailing during our cruise, I shall tell you that it has been rough, and at times extremely tempestuous. Especially did we find it so when the rascally bushrangers attempted to smoke us out, and also when we threw them off the trail by means of a first class ghost."

"A ghost!" replied Fred, looking first at Mr. Brown and then at me, as though we were quizzing him.

"Yes, he was a first class ghost, and no mistake," replied Mr. Brown, without moving a muscle of his face.

"Bah!" ejaculated Fred, with disdain.

"This is the very expression that we used when we were satisfied that the ghost was disposed to help us," I replied.

"Will you explain yourselves, or must I resort to extremities?" Fred exclaimed.

"Well, put the money in the safe, and then we will light our pipes, and repeat the history of our journey."

Fred hastened to comply, and while we were in the act of filling the store with tobacco smoke, we heard a commotion in front of our door, and the next instant the police commissioner entered without the formality of knocking.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "for my early visit, but I have weighty matters on hand, and have no time to lose."

We offered him a chair, but he declined the courtesy. We saw that he was ill at ease in the presence of the ex-inspector, and we rather enjoyed it than otherwise. As for Mr. Brown, he smoked his pipe with most admirable nonchalance, and appeared unconscious of the presence of his enemy.

"The fact of the matter is, gentlemen," the commissioner went on to say, "government has need of all its friends at the present time, for misguided men are plotting against its stability. The silly things will be crushed in the end; but our great desire is to make such a show of strength that no blood will be shed. Humanity dictates such a course, and I think that it will meet the approval of the governor and his advisers."

"Go on, sir," remarked Fred, seeing that the commissioner paused, as though uncertain what to say next.

"I thought of requesting you two gentlemen to volunteer your services as my aids, and if you comply, I will see that government is informed of the fact, and that you receive some substantial reward."

"In making the request I suppose that you think we shall be the means of enlisting a large portion of the American population of Ballarat into the service of the crown?"

The commissioner acknowledged, after some hesitancy, that such was his calculation.

"We shall have to decline your flattering offer," Fred said, firmly. "We have no desire to incur the hatred of the miners of Ballarat by appearing as oppressors. If you proposed an expedition against bushrangers we should be happy to comply with your wishes. As it is, we cannot."

The commissioner did not say a single word. He bowed rather stiffly. and then turned and left the store, and the next moment we heard him urging his horse through the street as though he was in a hurry to reach a certain point without loss of time.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

Steel Spring in the Field.—Attempt of the Commissioner to confiscate our Horses.

"I don't want to be severe in my language," Mr. Brown said, as he listened to the receding steps of the commissioner, "but in my opinion a more thorough d——d scoundrel don't exist than that same commissioner, who just set a trap for you, and caught nothing."

"In that opinion I will agree most heartily," replied Fred; "he imagines that we possess some influence over our countrymen, and he wished, by a little flattery, and a lucrative position, to attach us to his party. We will have nothing to do with the quarrel, but endeavor to take care of our property and our lives by keeping out of the fight, if, unfortunately, there is one."

While Fred was speaking, a smart, intelligent man, named Ross, who was regarded as the head of the rebellious movement, entered the store.

"I have made an early call," he said, "but not for the purpose of trading. The fact of it is, I heard it reported last night—in what manner is of little consequence—that you, gentlemen, were to be offered an official position under the commissioner. I chanced to see that gentleman when he left your premises, a few minutes since, and I thought that there might be color for the rumor. It is for the miners' interest and your own that the report should be contradicted, or else confirmed. I come to you as a friend, to ask which side you espouse. If you think that the miners are wrong, do not hesitate to say so, for I may then be enabled to render you some assistance, not by advice alone, but in a practical manner."

"If we thought your party was wrong, be assured that we should say so without equivocation," replied Fred; "we do not wish to take part in the struggle that is about to take place, and rest satisfied that we shall not, unless obliged to defend our property. If the commissioner has made a proposition to us—and I don't say that he has—be assured that we have not accepted it, and would not under any consideration whatever. If a similar offer was made by your party, it would meet with the same consideration. We are Americans, and strangers to the soil, and if we can remain neutral we shall. Our countrymen are their own masters, and can do as they please. If our advice was asked, we should tell them to keep to work, and out of harm's way. Is our position explicit enough?"

"I am satisfied, and will so state to those with whom I am connected,"

Mr. Ross replied, offering his hand in token of his friendship; "I must say there was some talk of the rash and ignorant, last night, to set fire to your store. I managed, by conciliating measures, to induce them to postpone all action until I was satisfied that you were with the government in feeling."

"If that is the manner in which the struggle is to be carried on," remarked Fred, "be assured that you will fail in your endeavors to obtain justice. No cause ever yet prospered where the torch of an incendiary was invoked to burn and destroy wantonly. Hearts that sympathize with you now would soon become alienated, and turn to the government for protection."

"I feel the force of your remarks," replied Mr. Ross, in a sorrowful tone, "and I am aware that they are just; but what can I do? I am considered at the head of the dissatisfied miners, yet I have no more real control over them than I have over you at this moment. They are undisciplined, and fierce as young bears anxious for a taste of blood. If I counsel honorable resistance, I am laughed at; if I request moderation, I am accused of cowardice. What can I do with such men as these?"

"We cannot advise, for our advice would not be taken," replied Fred; "but if I was placed in your position I know what I should do."

"Name it," said Ross, eagerly.

"Enforce discipline, or resign," was the reply.

"But the miners refuse to drill, or to be governed by military laws."

"Then let them look to themselves, and tell them so boldly. My word for it, that will bring them to reason, for where can they find another leader that commands the confidence that you do? Remember, with a mob, a very few words sways them for bad or good. Try the good, and await the result."

"Your advice shall be taken, although I have but faint hope of succeeding with the men. I can make an attempt, and if I die in seeking to secure the freedom of the miners, it shall never be said that I counselled extreme measures against those who wished to remain neutral."

Again he shook hands with us, and then left the store in a sorrowful and thoughtful mood, as though he felt a foreboding of his coming death, yet determined to yield his life for the benefit of his brother miners.

"There goes a man who is thrusting his head into the lion's mouth, and in less than a week he will meet a traitor's death, or suffer imprisonment for life at the hulks. He has been marked and watched for months, and be assured that the commissioner will not let him escape. Well, it is no business of mine." And Mr. Brown refilled his pipe, and threw his weary form upon a mattress, an example that I was not slow to follow.

It was late in the afternoon when we awoke, refreshed and ready for work, but as business was not very brisk, we walked about the town until supper time.

Mr. Brown and myself strolled towards Gravel Pit Hill, and to our surprise saw a large body of men, armed with rifles, shot guns, and old muskets of the most antique description, going through a dress parade,

as military men would call it, although candor compels me to confess that the costumes were not of the most *recherche* description, as no two were dressed alike, and no two held their guns in the same position.

"What is going on?" I asked of a fellow who stood looking at the scene with open mouth.

"Can't you see for yourselves?" was the prompt reply, and the answer was delivered without deigning to turn his head.

"You might be civil, at any rate," I replied, half a mind to kick him for his impertinence to us.

"Don't come round 'ere bothering me, young men," said the fellow, with a wave of his hand, as though desirous of cutting short the conversation.

I thought that I recognized the voice, although I was not certain. Neither had I seen the fellow's face, except by profile, so I just laid a hand upon his shoulder, gave him a whirl and brought him to the right about face. My suspicions were verified; I stood face to face with my old rascally friend, Steel Spring.

"Why, you scamp, where did you come from?" I asked.

"That's the vay vid the vorld," the fellow said, putting one hand to his eyes as though overcome by the unexpected interview; "a covey tries to be honest, and get a honest livin', but up comes somebody vot has been concerned vid him in the grab line, and insists upon being acquainted. I'll leave this 'ere country, I vill."

"Why, you rascal!" exclaimed the ex-inspector, "I've a good mind to lock you up until you eat humble pie for six weeks to come."

"No, you don't," replied Steel Spring, with a chuckle, "'cos you ain't inspector no more, no how, and you can't lock a covey up, and you know it."

"He has you there, Mr. Brown," I remarked, and it pleased Steel Spring so much that he condescended to regard us with a little more favor.

"If he has," replied Mr. Brown, "I've got him on another tack that would give him trouble. Come, tell us what you are doing here."

"Can't you see?" he answered, impudently. "I'm looking at that awkward squad of miners drilling, and pretty bad vork they make of it."

"But are you in the breaking and entering line, or the pickpocket business?" Mr. Brown asked.

"I don't answer any questions vot reflects on my honor as a gentleman," Steel Spring replied.

"But you can tell us what occasioned you to leave the service of Lieutenant Murden, can't you?" I remarked.

"I could tell, but I don't choose to."

"Very well," was the significant remark of my friend, "I know of a few *knucks* who are in town, and whom you were the means of burning out a few months since. I am not in the police department at present, and can't harm you, but I will hint to a few friends that you are in town."

We turned, as though about to leave him, but Steel Spring was not desirous of having a horde of desperadoes at his heels, as he inferred that he would have, if he suffered us to leave him displeased.

"O, don't quit a covey that vay," he cried, in an abject manner; "I don't vant to 'ave lots of henemies varever I goes, and you knows it."

"Well, then, tell us what made you quit Murden's service?" I asked.

He hesitated for a moment, as though almost resolved to tell a lie, but thought better of it and told the truth.

"Vell, if ye must know, I'll tell ye. There vas a trifling sum of money missed from the police office one day, and I vos suspected. That's all."

"Of course, you took the money, eh?" Mr. Brown remarked.

"I vish that you vouldn't ask me such strange questions. You is enough to confuse any one, I say."

"Did you take the money?" demanded Mr. Brown.

"Vell, yes, I s'pose I did. At leastwise it vas found on me, although how it came in my pocket I don't know," and the fellow chuckled at his falsehood.

"And I suppose Murden told you that he had no further occasion for your services," I remarked.

"I think that he said something of the kind, but I vas so confused that I don't remember all that took place. I know one thing, though, that I ain't forgot."

"Well, what is it?"

"Vy, a slight kicking that I got, and a request never to show my head in Melbourne again;" and the fellow rubbed his person as though it was still sore.

"Now, one question more," Mr. Brown said; "what brought you to this part of the country?"

Steel Spring hesitated for a moment, and then requested us to promise secrecy before he divulged. We readily complied, when he asked us to step one side, and where we could be sure not to be overheard. We withdrew from the stragglers who were loitering about, followed by Steel Spring.

"I've got something to do that pays better than vaiting on Lieutenant Murden," he whispered.

"Is the occupation honest?" I asked.

"If it hadn't been you vouldn't have caught me connected vid it," was the prompt reply.

"That we can tell after we have heard what you are doing. Go on."

"I'm engaged by the commissioner to endeavor to find out the feelings of these misguided men," Steel Spring said, still whispering.

"In other words, you are a spy," I remarked.

"Vell, I don't know about that," he said; "I'se promised to get all the facts that I can hear, and let the commissioner know 'em. If that is vot you call a spy, I s'pose I'm one on 'em."

"And the pay is large, I suppose?"

"Vell, I can find no fault in that line yet. I s'pose that I shall earn my money, no matter 'ow 'igh the wages is."

"Well, I don't envy you, if these rough miners get an inkling of your profession. Look out for them, for they don't understand practical joking," I remarked.

"That for 'em!" ejaculated Steel Spring, snapping his fingers. "I

know something that vill take the edge off of 'em, if they show any of their spite."

"That's all talk," I replied.

"Perhaps it is;" and Steel Spring shook his head with mysterious silence.

"Give us the information, and let us see how important it is," Mr. Brown remarked.

"Vell, then, vot do you think of a company of artillery comin' 'ere?"

"Impossible!" I replied; "there's been no artillery ordered here as yet. There's soldiers and policemen enough."

"The commissioner don't think so, for four days ago he sent word to Melbourne for a company to come up and bring their guns vid 'em, and the coveys is already on their vay."

"Then he must have sent despatches that the miners know nothing about," remarked Mr. Brown, in a musing tone.

"Lord bless you, I should 'ope so," returned Steel Spring, with some disdain; "he is von of 'em for doing things up secret like, and vot he don't know ain't vorth knowing."

"This is news of some importance," I whispered to Mr. Brown; "the miners should know it, or they will be cut to pieces."

"We are to remain neutral, you know," Mr. Brown said, suggestively, and I felt that if I interfered I could no longer maintain my character as friend to both parties.

I turned to bribe Steel Spring to give the miners a hint of the approaching company, but that worthy had suddenly disappeared in the crowd, and all efforts to find him were fruitless.

For half an hour we remained upon the ground watching the evolutions of the miners, as they went through various military manœuvres, and then we returned to the store to find that Smith had arrived during our absence, and had brought with him a large stock of goods, and that he and Fred were hard at work unloading them.

I of course joined them without delay, and by sundown the carts were unloaded, and the oxen secured for the night. We were all glad to see our partner, and innumerable were the questions with which we plied him, both before and after supper, and gladly did he answer them, and then produced for our perusal a pile of newspapers from Yankee land, which were worth more than ten times their weight in gold.

While we were sitting around our rude table, making up accounts and conversing about business, Steel Spring entered the store with as much assurance as a first class customer. Fred and Smith both welcomed him with a few remarks, but Steel Spring seemed somewhat hurried, and declined to be seated. At length he gave me a signal that he wished to communicate something to me in private, and I followed him to the door.

"I thought that I vould come and give ye a bit of news, 'cos ye always treated me vell," he said, in a low whisper, and after a careful glance around to see if there were listeners near at hand.

I acknowledged the remark, and he continued:—

"I heerd the commissioner give orders to-night that your 'osses should be seized in the morning for the sogers to ride on, and I think he is doing it out of spite."

"But he has no right to touch private property," I remarked.

"Vot does you s'pose he cares for the right? He vill say that they is needed, and that is 'nough. You can't help yourselves, you can't. Vot is the use of talking?"

"But we will talk, and to some purpose," I replied, indignant at the outrage that was to be committed upon us.

"No, don't you say one vord, 'cos it vouldn't help the matter, and he could hinjure you more than the 'osses is vorth. Do you take and sell 'em. Don't you know some covey vot has got the ready tin vould buy 'em?"

"We had an offer this very morning for all three of the animals by the American stage company."

"Vas the hoffer a good one?" asked Steel Spring, in a low voice.

"Yes; all that the animals are worth."

"Then do you go at vonce and get the tin, and tell the coveys that you vant them taken off now — this werry evening. The commissioner von't interfere vid the stage company. He knows better."

I thanked Steel Spring for his information, and then whispered, while I placed some gold coins in his hand, —

"Don't you think that you could contrive to let Captain Ross know something in regard to the artillery company?"

"I s'pose you have some veighty reasons for axing me to do it?" the spy replied.

"So weighty, that ten sovereigns will be given to the man who conveys the information."

"Ten sovereigns," repeated the fellow, slowly, as though considering of the matter; "you don't know how it vould hinjure my conscience to sell the secrets of the commissioner."

"I will make them fifteen, then," I answered.

"That is somethin' like. The vork is done, and no mistake. The captain vill have the information. To-morrow I vill come for the shiners."

He left me suddenly, and stole silently away in the darkness, just as a policeman halted in front of the store and scrutinized the building as though it was a resort for traitors, and he was determined to keep his eye upon our movements. I knew the man, and he knew me, so I stopped to exchange a few words with him.

"How goes the war?" I asked.

The officer glanced hastily around to see if he was watched before he replied, —

"The times are hard, when we have to look after old acquaintances."

"Why, who are you watching for now?" I inquired.

"Why, I hope that your honor won't be offended, but I have got orders to report all who go into the store, and examine all who leave it."

"The commissioner is carrying matters with a high hand," I replied, "but we can afford to submit to some inconvenience, and still disregard his petty malice. Do your duty, and don't be fearful of offending us."

"I'll do what I am compelled to, and no more," was the response; "if the commissioner thinks I'm going to act the spy on your movements he's damnably mistaken, I can tell him."

The officer passed along on his beat, and I rejoined my friends and communicated Steel Spring's information. Every one expressed surprise, and protested against such high-handed proceedings. But we were powerless to resist, for the commissioner was supreme in his authority, and there was no appeal, except through the government at Melbourne.

We resolved, however, to defeat his machinations, and I lost no time in visiting the agent of the stage company, stating that we wished to dispose of our horses, and had the satisfaction of receiving the money for them that evening.

The agent desired that the horses should remain in our possession until morning, but he agreed to assume all the responsibility, and even smiled when I ventured to hint that perhaps the commissioner would visit us at an early hour.

"Give me a bill of sale, signed by your firm," the agent said, "and I will risk all attempts at confiscation."

I did as he requested, and got two or three respectable men to witness my signature, and the delivery of the money, and then I went back to the store and chuckled at the thought of the disappointed commissioner next morning.

We did not retire very early, but sat up with closed doors and darkened windows, and read our papers and talked until long past midnight. Our business affairs were prosperous — we were free from debts of any kind — we had ready money enough on hand to take advantage of the markets, and buy low and sell dear — and to crown all, we had many thousand dollars lying idle in the Melbourne bank, which we could resort to in case of necessity. Our position was good, but a few losses by bad management would have made us as pecuniarily poor as when we reached the country, therefore the little trouble which we had with the commissioner gave us considerable annoyance, for in various ways he could injure us.

We went to bed that night with considerable anxiety on our minds, but with a firm determination that if we were imposed upon we would resist, and even carry our grievances before the governor, if we could obtain redress in no other way. We were anxious for daylight, yet dreaded the disagreeable results which it would bring forth.

No sooner had the sun shown its hot face than we heard a commotion in front of the store, but we remained seated at our table leisurely eating breakfast, and pretending that we cared but little for the excitement in the street. Presently a police officer put his head in at the door and shouted out, —

"I say, you!"

"Well, what say you?" asked Fred, without moving.

"The commissioner wants to speak to you instantly."

"Well, tell him to come in," I responded.

"He can't; he's 'ossback."

"And we are at breakfast," Fred cried.

"He's in a hurry."

"So are we."

"Will you come?"

"Certainly; after we have finished eating our breakfast."

The fellow uttered an oath, and withdrew his head to report to his superior officer. In a few minutes afterwards we heard the heavy steps of men approaching us, and looking up we saw the dark face of the commissioner, and the bull-dog countenance of Colonel Kellum, who had command of the military in Ballarat.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Fred said, rising, and placing chairs for our visitors.

A brief nod was the only sign of recognition that was returned, but the chairs were not accepted.

"To what are we indebted for this early visit?" Fred asked.

"We have come, sir, for——"

The commissioner had proceeded thus far, when he seemed confused, and stopped. He may have felt that he was about to commit an unjustifiable outrage, and wished the colonel to share half of the responsibility.

"The fact is, sir," the military man exclaimed, most pompously, "we want your horses in the name of the government."

"Our horses, did you say?" Fred asked, with a sweet smile.

"That's what I said, sir," the colonel replied, swelling with bad blood and dignity.

"I think that you are mistaken, sir, as we are not the owners of any such kind of animals," Fred answered.

"Why, what do you call them, sir?" the colonel cried, triumphantly, pointing to the unconscious brutes, who were eating their provender in the stable which we had built just adjoining the store.

"Those are horses, certainly, sir, but they don't belong to us."

His face was a picture when he replied, it was so gentle, and appeared so bland and courteous, as though he would not offend for the world.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

SAME CONTINUED. — DEATH OF ROSS.

"YOUNG man," cried the colonel, his face swelling as though the hot blood would burst through its thin covering, "do you mean to tell me that those animals do not belong to you or your partner?"

"In the first place," answered Fred, with quiet dignity, "my name is Frederick ———, and I desire to be addressed as such in our communications, and not by the ambiguous title of 'young man.' In the next place, as I told you before, we are not the owners of those animals."

"It's a trick to cheat us," muttered the commissioner.

"Did you address a remark to me?" Fred asked, turning to the police officer.

The commissioner declined to reply, but he seemed to feel what he had uttered.

"The animals are wanted, and we shall take them, sir, for the use of

the government; for the use of the government, sir, I suppose that you understand," the colonel cried.

"That is something that we have no control over, and are not interested in. I have no doubt that the owner or owners of the animals know how to protect their own property, and will do so."

The commissioner made a signal to his men, and three or four of them started for the stable to remove the animals. Just at that moment the agent of the stage company entered the store, and his presence was never more desirable.

"Hullo," he cried, "what the devil are you doing with my horses, Fred?"

"We are doing nothing with them, but these gentlemen seemed to think that government was in want of them, and therefore are about to confiscate them. I am glad that you have arrived in time to make terms of sale."

"Terms of the devil!" the agent shouted; "here, you, sirs, take those animals back to the stable, or I'll break you finer than a piece of quartz after it has passed through a mill!"

The men stood irresolute, and looked towards their chief.

"We want the animals," the colonel said.

"And will have them," the commissioner exclaimed.

"Gentlemen," said the agent of the stage company, "these animals belong to me; I have paid for them, and have a bill of sale, and the man who dares to detain them does so at his peril."

"Let us see the document," the military man said, after a whispered consultation with the commissioner.

The agent handed the paper to the colonel, and he studied over it carefully.

"Why, this document was signed last night," he exclaimed, with a sour look at Fred.

"What's that got to do with the question?" the agent asked, abruptly.

"Because I believe that it's a d—n trick to cheat the government!" shouted the colonel, boiling over with rage.

"Do you dare address such words to me, sir?" cried Fred.

"Or to me, either?" demanded the agent.

"Your uniform shall be no protection, unless you unsay what you have uttered," Fred continued, advancing in a menacing manner towards the colonel.

"Don't be rash," I whispered, laying a hand on Fred's shoulder; "remember that he is high in rank, and won't meet you."

"But I will post him in every town in Australia, unless he apologizes or fights."

"When the government solicited our company to establish a daily line of stages between Ballarat and Melbourne, we were promised all the assistance that officials could afford, and no interference was to be allowed; I see that the commissioner, and you, Colonel Kellum, are desirous of driving us from the town, and compelling us to abandon our enterprise. I shall take immediate steps to let the government know the reason of our refusal to continue the contract."

The speech of the agent was a telling one on the colonel and com-

missioner, for they knew that government would never pardon interference with a line that cost so much money to establish, and which was carrying information through the country at an unprecedentedly rapid rate. No wonder they stopped to consider, and changed their fierce aspect for one of conciliation, for they knew that suspension from duty would probably follow a remonstrance from the company.

"If you have bought the horses we have nothing further to say," the commissioner remarked, turning to the agent; "it was a mistake on our part in supposing that they belonged to these gentlemen, whom we are proud to call friends, and to whom we now desire to state that we only proposed to borrow the animals for a short time, and return them after these unhappy troubles."

"If the d——d brutes were not killed," muttered the colonel, *sotto voce*, and with a look of the most intense hatred.

"Colonel Kellum, you accuse me of acting unfairly in this business, and I desire an explanation," Fred said, the matter still rankling in his mind.

"I have given the only explanation that I shall give, and with that you must rest satisfied," was the reply of the red-faced Briton.

"Then I suppose that you will favor me with a meeting at an early hour?" Fred asked.

"What!" cried the military man, with some surprise, "a colonel in her majesty's army meet a dealer in tea and coffee? You must be mad!"

The red face of the military man grew purple as he thought of the indignity.

"Then I can only suppose that you are a coward, and that even a blow would not induce you to fight. Is that the case, sir?"

The colonel smiled with bitter scorn, and turned to leave the store.

"You refuse me an apology, do you?" Fred demanded, springing in front of Kellum, and barring his way to the door.

"Out of my way, grocer," the colonel shouted, with a laugh so insulting that Fred could contain himself no longer. He raised his hand and struck his opponent a light blow across his face.

Kellum swelled until I thought that every vein in his body would burst at the indignity. He muttered a few inaudible words, and then rubbed his forehead as though he did not half comprehend the insult, and wished to recall his scattered senses to know whether it was real.

"Now," said Fred, "you can go. I have repaid you insult for insult, and we are even-handed. If you desire satisfaction for the blow, you know where to find me."

"Yes, I can find you now!" Kellum hissed, with an oath of some magnitude; "you have struck me, and have sold your last pound of tea on earth."

"Look out!" shouted the stage agent; and his words of caution were none too soon, for the colonel drew his sword suddenly, and made a desperate lunge at Fred, which he avoided, and the point of the blade struck against a nail keg, and broke short off.

"A brave man, to refuse to meet a grocery dealer," my friend said, sarcastically; "I hope that the British army is not composed of such

noble spirits as you; if it is assassination must be held in repute wherever there is a regiment."

The colonel was too angry to reply, but I thought that he seemed ashamed of his late attempt on the life of my friend, for he sheathed his sword without seeking to again use it.

"You shall hear from me in the course of the day," Kellum said, and without looking to the right or left he marched from the store, mounted his horse, and left our part of the town in peace.

"He is the most unscrupulous colonel in the English army," the agent said, after we had got rid of our unwelcome visitors; "he is feared by his men, and disliked by his officers, and he was never yet quartered in a town without finding cause to quarrel with some of the inhabitants. He has been sent here to crush this rebellion, and unless you shoot him he will do it, even if he has to shed torrents of blood.

"By the way," the agent said, as he turned to leave the store, "the miners must have employed our countrymen to chop wood for them last night, if I might judge from appearances."

"How so?"

"Why, haven't you heard the news?" he asked, in surprise.

"No; what has transpired?"

"Why, the miners are building fortifications on Gravel Pit Hill, and last night the sound of axes was heard from dark until light. A thousand trees were felled and trimmed, and cut into suitable lengths for a palisade, and even now men are at work digging holes in the sand to insert the ends of the timber. The miners mean mischief, and we shall have a hot fight before long."

"But why don't the commissioner interfere, and prevent the men from continuing the work?" I asked.

"That is something that I cannot explain, although I have endeavored to solve the mystery. The miners think that he is frightened, and therefore count on an easy victory."

The agent bade us a good morning, and walked off to attend to his duties.

"Can't you see through this seeming indifference?" asked Mr. Brown; "the commissioner has sent for artillery, and expects the arrival of the company in a day or two at farthest. The palisade will afford but trifling resistance to a twelve pound cannon ball. Besides, there is more glory for the officers if the miners are fortified. Be assured that the commissioner winks at the operations of the disaffected, simply because he can crush them more effectually if cooped up, than displayed upon the plain."

"But if the artillery were cut off and sent back to Melbourne with the loss of their guns, the miners would have the best of the bargain," I suggested.

"By the Lord Harry, I never thought of that," cried Mr. Brown, with enthusiasm; "that would be worth a careful consideration if Ross only could get the idea. I've half a mind to suggest it to him."

While he was speaking Steel Spring entered the store, ostensibly to buy a plug of tobacco, but in reality not to pay for it.

"Well," I whispered, while serving him, "did you convey the information to Ross?"

"Of course," he replied, promptly.

"And what did he say?" I asked.

"That he now knew his friends, and would take measures to prewent the sogers from getting here in a hurry."

I had no time to talk farther with Steel Spring, for he seemed impatient to be gone, so I slyly slipped the money into his hand, and he left the store with a chuckle of such intense delight that a tall policeman near the door asked him where he got his swipes.

Trade was remarkably good that day. There was a steady stream of gold dust pouring in, in exchange for many articles which were usually slow of sale. A large portion of our stock of liquors was sold in bottles and demijohns, and there were many inquiries for powder and lead, but we were not allowed by the authorities to deal in such articles, and even if we had been, we should have declined to sell them under the circumstances, knowing that the ammunition was intended for the especial benefit of the soldiers and police officers, and in the latter force we had many friends.

We closed the store earlier than usual that night, for there was an agitation pervading the working class that showed that the eventful hour was approaching when the miners were to measure their strength with the disciplined soldiers of their country. The red coats were under arms at their barracks, and a man informed me that he had seen each soldier served with ball cartridges, and that afterwards they loaded their guns carefully, as though determined to make every shot tell.

Two or three times during the evening we were on the point of venturing into the streets, but a fear of getting embroiled with the military prevented us.

We heard the heavy tramp of men as they marched through the street, and each moment expected to listen to the roar of musketry. While we were thus expectant, a light rap at the door, and a voice with which we were familiar, attracted our attention.

I unbarred the door and let in Steel Spring.

"Things is vorking," he said, rubbing his hands with glee; "'fore morning we'll 'ave a fight, and I don't care vich vins, I don't."

"How do the miners remain?" I asked; "are they firm?"

"Vell, vot there is of 'em is brave 'nough, but that 'ere Ross has sent avay 'is best men, and let others go 'ome for the night. He vill catch it afore mornin'."

"The man is mad," remarked Mr. Brown. "He should have kept every miner under arms through the night. The commissioner means mischief, I'll warrant."

"Don't he, though!" exclaimed Steel Spring, winking both his eyes violently.

"What are his plans?" I asked.

"Vell, 'tain't hardly right in me to tell 'em," the fellow said, as though he didn't want to reveal all that he knew, although I could see that he was anxious to, "but the commissioner has sent out men to mislead the party vot has gone to stop the artillery, and they vill get on another road and not come back for two or three days. The Yankee chaps vid their rifles 'ave gone vid the green vons, and now the colonel don't care

an old button for the rest. An attack vill be made to-night at one o'clock, but don't tell that I said so."

We did not promise a compliance with his request, and after a liberal drink of whiskey Steel Spring left us to plot mischief, and to steal whatever he could lay his hands on during the melee.

We held a short counsel, and then resolved that, as the time was near at hand when the attack was contemplated, we would risk our lives in witnessing it, and, if possible, render some assistance to the injured, whether miners or soldiers. We locked up our gold in the safe, and then started for Gravel Pit Hill. The streets were silent and deserted. Not a policeman wearing a blue coat was to be seen until we entered the square where the palisades were erected, and there we found about five hundred men drawn up in line, silent and immovable, their muskets gleaming by the starlight, awaiting but the order to open a volley upon the poor fellows who were cooped up behind the timber, full of pluck, yet hardly prepared to meet so many disciplined men, and hoping that only a menace was intended.

"Who comes there?" shouted a sentry, as we approached.

"Friends," I replied.

"Well, friends, stand back and keep out of sight, or you'll lose the number of your mess," the soldier added, jocosely.

We had no desire for such a calamity, and therefore retired to another part of the hill, and managed to secrete ourselves from observation by keeping within the shadow of a friendly tree.

We had not been in our position more than fifteen minutes when we heard a clash of arms, and the sound of many feet in motion. The soldiers were formed in two columns, and were rushing with headlong speed towards the palisades.

The movement was so sudden that the miners were entirely unprepared. Many of them were asleep, and others had laid their guns aside, and were at work strengthening the fortifications when the soldiers commenced the attack. A number of the bravest raised a shout and discharged their muskets at the approaching columns, but the soldiers did not falter. They answered the cheer of the miners with a yell, at the sound of which many of the young men became panic-stricken, threw down their arms, and fled for their lives.

Amid the uproar I could hear the loud voice of Ross urging his men to stand to their posts firmly and fight to the last, and a few obeyed, and poured straggling volleys upon the red coats. Occasionally I could hear the sharp crack of the American rifle, and I felt sorry to think that my countrymen were fighting against men who would show them no mercy if victory perched upon the banner of the government officials.

Cheer after cheer both parties gave, and then there was heard the sound of axes and the placing of scaling ladders, as the soldiers gained the palisades.

"On them, bullies!" shouted a voice, which I recognized as Colonel Kellum's; "show the d——d rebels no quarter! Kill, kill, kill!"

The soldiers had got their blood up, and responded to the barbarous orders with a yell like famished tigers on the scent of blood. The timbers were torn away, and in rushed the disciplined men, firing volley

after volley upon all who met their view. We could hear the groans of the wounded, and shrieks of the dying, until at last the firing ceased for the want of victims, many having made their escape.

"Do you surrender?" we heard the colonel shout; and although we could not see whom he addressed, we suspected that Ross and his boldest adherents were making a stand in the enclosure.

"Let us try and save them," cried Fred; and without listening to our warning, he started towards the palisade, followed close by Mr. Brown, Smith, and myself.

The soldiers took but little notice of us, thinking that we were government officials; so we worked our way by them until we reached the spot where Colonel Kellum was standing, surrounded by his officers.

"Do the d——d rebels surrender?" the colonel repeated, just as we could witness the proceedings.

"Here's the leader of 'em, sir, that says he will," cried two or three soldiers, escorting Ross towards the colonel.

"The leader, hey! Bring him here," was the command.

Ross walked firmly towards his conqueror, and stopped when within a few paces.

"Are you the leader of these ragamuffins?" demanded Kellum, arrogantly.

"I was the leader of the miners, sir," Ross replied, firmly.

"You own it, do you? Hand me your gun."

Ross complied with the command.

"Is it loaded?" the colonel asked.

"Yes, sir," was the brief response.

"Then I will discharge it for you," the military despot said.

He cocked the piece, placed it within two feet of the Canadian's breast, and fired. The unhappy man sprang into the air, threw his arms wildly over his head, and fell a corpse, a bullet having entered his heart.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

ARREST OF FRED. — TRIP TO MELBOURNE, AND ITS RESULTS.

THERE was a cry of horror at the atrocity of the deed; not from any of the officers who were present, but from the soldiers, who were not used to warfare of that description.

"O, cowardly deed," cried Fred, who could not prevent giving expression to his feelings.

"Ha! what was that?" roared the colonel, turning towards us.

I endeavored to drag Fred from the scene, but he resisted my efforts stoutly.

"I say that to shoot a prisoner in cold blood is murder, and none but a base coward would resort to such an act," cried Fred, raising his voice.

"Secure that man," roared the colonel; but not a soldier stirred to enforce the order.

"In the name of God, make your escape," whispered Mr. Brown; but Fred disdained to fly.

"Will no one obey me?" roared the colonel, turning to his officers. "Do you refuse to do your duty? By G—, I'll break every man in the regiment, unless you are a little more prompt. Arrest that man, sirs, and bring him before me," he continued, turning to his officers.

They obeyed, but unwillingly, and moved so slowly that Fred could easily have escaped had he been so disposed. I sought to urge him to dodge behind the soldiers, but he sternly refused; and when the officers surrounded him, he walked with a firm step towards the tyrant, and without suffering a hand to be laid upon his shoulder.

"You find fault with the method which I resort to to punish rebellion, do you?" demanded the colonel, with a savage laugh.

"If it was with my last breath, I would protest against so cowardly an outrage," replied Fred, with all the contempt that he could assume.

"Hullo! I know that voice," cried Kellum, starting forward, and pulling Fred's cap from his face. "D——n me, if I didn't think so," he continued. "You are the grocer that dared to raise your hand against me yesterday morning. Iron him, and away with him to the barracks."

"For what crime, sir?" I asked, starting forward.

"For rebellion," shouted the colonel. "He has dared to interfere with the army of Her Majesty, while suppressing treason."

"He came here to assist the wounded, and had no intention of interfering with the soldiers," I said.

"Away with you, or I'll lock you up, and send you to Melbourne for trial, with your partymen. Go."

"Don't provoke him," whispered an officer. "Obey him, and we will do all that we can for your friend."

"Will you allow me to exchange one word with your prisoner?" I asked of Kellum.

"What, not gone yet?" he roared. "Ready," he shouted, addressing his soldiers, "aim," and the word to "fire," was trembling on his lips, when the officers forced us from the presence of the brute, and we heard the cries of the wounded as they were roughly handled by the soldiers, for the purpose of securing them and conveying them to the barracks.

The soldiers were also employed in attending to their own wounded, several of whom had fallen, and while I carefully picked my way through the crowd I stumbled over a prostrate body, which caused us to stop, and see if we could be of any assistance. I stooped down and placed my hand upon the man's head, and felt his hot blood gush from a wound in his heart. I removed the poor fellow's broad rimmed hat, and saw, to my surprise, that it was Steel Spring.

"Why, it is our old companion," I cried, feeling really sorry at his misfortune. "Help me to lift him up, and we will carry him to the store."

"It's no use," gasped the wounded man. "Got a ball in my breast; all over vid me — sorry I came 'ere — didn't mean to — didn't get pay

for this — don't disturb me. I shall die in ten minutes — know it — vill bet all the money I've got that I do — I'm sorry for all my rascalities."

He ceased to speak, and placing his hand upon his breast, groaned as though suffering terrible pain. The blood from his wound flowed on unceasingly.

"Cheer up, old friend," I said, encouragingly. "There is life still left, and we can get you on your feet in a few weeks by the aid of a doctor. We will get a litter, and carry you to the store."

Smith started in search of one, and left Mr. Brown and me to look after the wounded man.

"'Tis werry kind of you, but 'tis no use," Steel Spring whispered. "I've got a load here that vill keep me quiet arter I'm dead. I shan't be able to steal then, 'cos gold vould be of no use to me vere I'm going."

"If you want to save that covey's life, you'd better make him hold his gab, and get him off the ground as soon as possible," an English soldier said, stopping for a moment to examine our old companion's wound, and then passing on with as much indifference as it was possible to manifest.

Luckily the litter arrived, and we managed to get Steel Spring on to it, and carried him to the store. There was but little life in him, and that little we tried to retain, and consulted with the best doctor in Ballarat for that purpose. The physician said that the ball would have to be extracted first, when the wound would heal of itself, if nothing in the shape of inflammation intervened, and to prove that he was right, probed the wound, started the bleeding afresh, and in less than an hour after the spy was carried to our store he was a corpse, and the doctor had sent in his bill for medical attendance, and charged in proportion to his ignorance, which was immense.

Leaving Smith to manufacture a coffin out of the spare boards and boxes which the store contained, Mr. Brown and myself started for the head quarters of the commissioner for the purpose of seeking an interview, and obtaining the release of Fred, who, I doubted not, would be set free in the morning, as no charge could be brought against him of a rebellious nature.

We found a guard of soldiers stationed around the house, and an eager and excited crowd was kept at a distance by a line of bayonets. I saw that the miners were anxious to learn if any of their friends were wounded or taken prisoners, yet could obtain no satisfactory information, as all intercourse with those in custody was denied.

"Stand back, sir," cried a sergeant, as Mr. Brown and myself pressed forward for the purpose of reaching the entrance to the building.

"Hullo, Richards! is that you?" Mr. Brown exclaimed, extending his hand.

"Ah, excuse me, sir; I didn't recognize you. Sorry to be obliged to stop you, sir, but have got positive orders to admit only those having business."

"Then we are just the ones to pass, for we have business of importance with the commissioner."

"Ah, that alters the case. Pass in, gentlemen;" and as the soldiers lowered their bayonets, we slipped past them, and in a few minutes found ourselves in the ante-room of the commissioner.

"You had better go in alone, for I can be of no service to you," whispered Mr. Brown; and I felt the truth of the remark.

I boldly followed an officer into the commissioner's room, and soon found myself in the presence of Kellum, the commissioner, and half a dozen captains and lieutenants.

"I tell you, that every dog of them should be shot, and then you'll hear no more of taxes and rebellion. That's the way I'd punish treason, and it will be effectual. We should have no more meetings and political speeches by men who don't know what they are ranting about. We have got the rebels at our feet. Let us trample upon them."

"It will not do," replied the commissioner, mildly, with his usual crafty calculation. "The home government will hear of the matter, and rake us over the coals for it. Besides, the newspapers would raise a prodigious row, and then Parliament will have to appoint a commissioner of inquiry. No, no; I've thought the matter over carefully, and I'm convinced that we should get awfully blackballed if we shoot the rascals, although"—and he smiled and rubbed his hands with glee—"I should like the sport."

"Say but the word, and in fifteen minutes every dog of them shall be dead," cried the colonel, who, having tasted blood, wished for more.

"No, no; let us send them to Melbourne, where a long imprisonment and low diet will be the fate of each."

The colonel was about to make some observation, when an officer touched his elbow, and called his attention to me.

"Hullo, by G—d, sir, how long have you been in this room?" he roared.

"I should judge about five minutes," I replied, calmly.

"And your business here?" he demanded, fiercely; and I saw that he had not forgotten the blow which Fred dealt him the day before.

"My business is not with you, sir, but with this gentleman," I replied, turning to the commissioner.

"Well, transact it, and be off. If that sergeant admits another grocer, I'll hang him before morning."

I did not notice the sneer, but turned towards the commissioner, upon whom I hoped to make a favorable impression.

"I have called, sir, to see if I could not make arrangements for the release of my friend, who was taken into custody to-night, and who is innocent of any connection with this rebellion."

"What arrangement do you wish to make?" the commissioner asked.

"I will give bonds to a large amount for his appearance at any time that you may appoint."

"Why, the grocer thinks that he is in a court of law," the colonel said, with a most insulting sneer.

"No, sir," I replied, "I thought that I was in the presence of gentlemen."

"None of your insolence here," the bully roared, not liking the smile which he saw upon the faces of his officers.

"Insolence is but a poor weapon to gain a cause, and a gentleman should never use it unless to rebuke presumption," I replied.

"We cannot take the bail that you offer," the commissioner said.

"Your partner was arrested for giving vent to treasonable expressions, and after he was taken into custody, on his person was found a dangerous weapon, in the shape of a revolver."

"Don't say that the pistol was dangerous to any one but himself," the colonel cried. "I dare say that if he had attempted to shoot any one, he would not have known how."

"There is where you do the gentleman an injustice," an officer remarked.

"If you did not think him dangerous, you should have met after the scene in our store," I said, addressing the colonel, and alluding to the blow which Fred had struck him.

"I am not accustomed to meet every pauper that presents himself for battle. I don't wish to place him on a level with myself, and therefore will wait until he proves himself a gentleman."

"There is where you are mistaken, colonel," said a young gentleman dressed in the uniform of a captain. "I had the pleasure of meeting both of these gentlemen at a levee of the governor's, and I know that he spoke very highly of them, and offered to reward them with lucrative positions for their services in destroying two or three bands of bush-rangers, who had long been a terror to travellers. It does not require a patent of nobility to make them gentlemen."

"Why, Captain Fitz, you had better offer to defend the prisoner, you speak so warmly in his behalf," sneered the colonel.

"I am not a lawyer, sir, although if I am called upon to give my testimony, I think that I shall say what I please regarding the slaughter of twenty-two miners, whose only crime was protesting against an unjust tax."

"Say what you please, and welcome; but while you are under my command you must obey my orders or else stand the chances of a court-martial. I don't think that the miners agree with you," the military despot continued, after a moment's consultation with the commissioner; "I desire that you take command of the escort which is about to start for Melbourne with the prisoners. You will lose not a moment, but report yourself ready in an hour's time."

"I do not require even a moment's time," replied the young man; "I am ready now, and am only too anxious to start."

"As for you, sir," the colonel said, turning to me, "you can see your friend after he reaches Melbourne, but not before. He is charged with a serious crime, and those higher in power than myself must deal with him."

I left the apartment, uncertain what to do or where to go. Mr. Brown joined me in the ante-room, but read the result of my mission in my face.

"There's no hope?" he asked.

"None; he goes to Melbourne to-night."

"So much the better," answered Mr. Brown, promptly; "now we shall have a fair chance for his freedom; for great things can sometimes be accomplished in that city."

"But Fred will suffer on the route," I remarked, "and unless he is cared for, will never reach the city alive."

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness on that score," Captain Fitz

said, he having heard my last remark; "I will take care that he is treated with as much consideration as the circumstances will admit of, and see that he wants for nothing."

I uttered a few hurried thanks, and the captain was about to pass, when I detained him.

"Is there any means by which we can obtain an interview with my friend?" I asked.

"I fear not," he answered, in a hesitating manner, which inspired me with some hope.

"Only a few words," I pleaded.

"If the colonel or commissioner should know that I ever listened to the suggestion, there would be a pretty row," muttered the captain, still hesitating.

"But they need not know it," I repeated.

"Come, Captain Fitz, for old acquaintance sake, let us see the young man. No harm will come of it, and you will be doing a good service," said Mr. Brown, who knew the officer while quartered at Melbourne.

"Well, I will see what I can do for you; but remember, I shall give you only five minutes."

"That will answer our purpose," I replied.

"Then wait here a few moments, until I report myself ready for the march. The prisoners are being mustered, and preparing for the long tramp, for we have got to get them out of Ballarat before daylight, for fear of an attack and rescue."

He spoke hurriedly, and then entered the commissioner's room, where he remained ten minutes, when he again joined us.

"All right," he whispered; "put on these overcoats and caps — you must pass for officers, or there will be an end to all attempts at an interview."

We were too glad to comply with the request to waste words, and as soon as we had donned the disguise we followed the captain out of the front door, passed double lines of soldiers, still on duty, but resting on their arms, and at length reached a strong building where the prisoners were confined, and where preparations were being made for their removal.

A dozen or twenty soldiers guarded the door; but at the sight of the captain and his uniform, arms were presented, the door was unlocked, and we passed into a room thirty feet square, where we found about twenty-five of the most prominent miners, lounging about, talking, and apparently entirely indifferent to their fate. We cast our eyes over the crowd, and soon saw Fred, holding a conversation with a soldier, whom he was endeavoring to bribe to get writing materials, so that he could indite a few lines to us before he left.

"Step this way, my man," I said, disguising my voice, and addressing my friend.

He looked somewhat astonished, but as he could not see my face, he did not know me.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your pleasure?" he asked, as he followed us to the most remote part of the room.

"To see you before you left, and to convince you that we will make every exertion to secure your release," I whispered.

"Ah, Jack," my friend said, squeezing my hand, "I knew that you would not let me leave without making an effort to see me. A thousand thanks for this kindness."

"Don't be discouraged," I continued; "Mr. Brown and myself are going to Melbourne in the morning, and we will use all our influence to get you clear. Is there any thing that you desire?"

"I don't know of any thing, unless you can send me a few clothes, so that I can have a change after reaching the city."

"We will await your arrival, and while we are away, Smith must look after the business."

"Time is up, gentlemen," Captain Fitz said, approaching us.

"One moment, sir. — Have you any gold in your pockets?" I asked.

"A few shilling pieces — nothing more," Fred replied.

"Then take these sovereigns;" and I slipped a dozen into his hand.

"I must again remind you, gentlemen," the captain remarked.

"We are all ready to leave, and have only one more favor to ask. Let us have a moment's conversation with the orderly sergeant, who will have the immediate care of the prisoners."

"There he stands," the captain replied, pointing to a six-footer, who was ironing the men, and who was waiting to handcuff Fred.

The captain smiled to see the eagerness with which I rushed towards the man, and then very wisely turned his back upon us. He suspected what I intended to do.

"You have the immediate charge of the prisoners?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he replied, with some show of respect, for we wore the overcoats of officers.

"Will you see that my friend there has every comfort that it is possible to obtain on the route?" I asked.

"They must all share alike, sir," he answered.

"But will you promise not to iron him, and accept his word of honor that he will not attempt to run away?" I asked.

"Couldn't think of such a thing, sir. I'm responsible for every man."

"But he is a gentleman, and will keep his word, let what will happen," I pleaded.

Another reproval was springing from his lips, when suddenly his face underwent a remarkable change, and a smile took the place of a frown.

"Fifty more when I meet you in Melbourne, if you strictly comply with my requests," I whispered.

The soldier put his hand into his pocket with wonderful dexterity, and I heard gold chink as he withdrew it.

"All right, sir — rely upon me. The gentleman shall have my bed and grub, and ride beside me in the ambulance. I must keep an eye on him, you know, 'cos I'm 'sponsible for his safe keeping."

"Watch him as close as you please," I replied, "although I assure you that he would not escape after he has once passed his word for all the gold in the mines of Australia."

"Them's the kind of coveys I likes," responded the soldier. "He shan't feel the touch of the irons, and shall fare like a grenadier. But you won't forget the other fifty."

I assured the man that the money should be forthcoming; and just

then the shrill notes of a trumpet were heard outside, followed by the roll of a drum.

"You must leave instantly," cried Captain Fitz, hurriedly. "The prisoners are about to be led out."

We rushed towards Fred, gave him a hearty shake of our hands, whispered a few words of encouragement, and then were compelled to leave the building.

"Pass this way, gentlemen," the captain said; "I'll escort you through the lines, as you might find some difficulty in answering the sentry's challenges."

We followed the kind-hearted officer, and were soon outside the lines, when we thanked him for his kindness.

"Some other time we will talk of the matter," he answered. "I must now hasten back to my command; but one word before we part. Don't think that all British officers resemble Colonel Kellum. Now, I will thank you for the overcoats, or my brother officers will scold worse than a dragoon. Adieu. We shall meet in Melbourne."

He disappeared in the darkness, and we walked silently to the store, where we found Smith, who was so overcome by the arrest of Fred that he had drank six or seven glasses of whiskey, and announced his intention of continuing to imbibe until he was lost to all reason. A few words of comfort, however, and an announcement that we should leave for Melbourne in the morning, and require him to look after the store until our return, sobered him, and he vowed not to touch another glass of spirits until Fred was released.

Mr. Brown promised to accompany me, and before morning we packed up our clothes, and at daylight we were on our way in the stage, rolling along at the rate of ten miles an hour; and in two days after leaving the mines we were in Melbourne, and closeted with Murden, who proved himself our friend in adversity, as he was in prosperity.

"I will do all that I can," he said, after listening to our story. "The commissioner has so magnified matters that the governor and council really think a most formidable insurrection has occurred, and that he has displayed great power in putting it down. To make the affair as complicated as possible, the governor seems to think that the Americans were at the head of the conspiracy, and have urged the English on to action. I, of course, know better, and will endeavor to have him put right on the subject."

Murden appointed an interview in the afternoon, and then left us to lay our case before a few of the most influential members of the council, while we visited old acquaintances, and explained to Smith's wife, who was living in a very pleasant house in the city, the reason why her husband would not return for a week or two. The lady was heartily glad to see me, and at her request Mr. Brown and myself took up our quarters in her house during our stay in the city.

In the afternoon we called on Murden, and found that he had accomplished his object. The governor, on his representations, had ordered a discharge to be immediately made out, and sealed by the broad seal of the colony, and intimated that a most thorough investigation should be instituted regarding the conduct of both the commissioner and Colonel Kellum at Ballarat.

"And now to conclude a long story," said Murden, "here is a discharge which states that your friend was unjustly arrested, and that he be released from custody, no matter under whose jurisdiction he may be, forthwith. His excellency also bade me state that he should be pleased to see you before your departure from the city, and requests Mr. Inspector Brown to repair to Ballarat and report for duty."

"Ah, Murden," Mr. Brown exclaimed, "I am indebted to you for this re-appointment."

"I thought that I might as well kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is, and faith I've done it. But I see that both of you are impatient to leave my pleasant company, which is ungrateful; but I overlook it with Christian meekness. You can't go though until you have dined with me, and then called to thank his excellency."

The proposition was accepted, and after dining with the lieutenant we visited the palace, and were most heartily greeted by the governor and his council, and at their request we explained our views at considerable length in relation to the affairs of Ballarat and the mining tax, and the means by which future troubles could be avoided. We were listened to with attention, and I sincerely believe that what we uttered that day did considerable towards inducing the government to abolish all excepting a mere nominal tax, and to once more restore order in the mines.

After leaving the palace we engaged seats in the stage, and that night were rolling towards Ballarat, with the expectation of meeting the military not more than thirty miles from Melbourne, and we were correct in our supposition, for just at daylight the driver stopped, and pointed out the company just striking their tents and getting ready for their morning march. We induced the driver to await our return, and to the extreme surprise of Captain Fitz we presented ourselves, and requested the release of Fred, and after a brief examination of the document the captain complied with our demand.

Our meeting with Fred was of a joyous description, but we had but little time to waste in explanations. The driver was impatient, and the soldiers ready to march. I had but time to reward the sergeant for his kindness, and to assure Fred's fellow-prisoners that I would use all the exertion that I could to obtain their pardons, when the rolling drum gave the signal for moving, and in a few minutes the military were lost to view in a cloud of dust.

But I must here draw my long narrative to a close, not because we did not afterwards meet with adventures worthy to be recounted, but because a lengthy absence from the country precludes the idea of further continuing the series of sketches, which I am glad to find have found favor in the eyes of the public.

For the satisfaction of the reader, I will state that for three years we remained in Australia, and then when we left that country it was with a solid conviction that we had been repaid for our toil and trouble, our sufferings and pleasures.

Before I bid farewell to my readers, I will state that the miners who were arrested and marched to Melbourne were all discharged, and that after the mining tax was reduced, all further trouble ceased.

In many instances, in the course of the narrative, I have used ficti-

tious names; but the reader will pardon me when I state that most of those introduced are still alive, and employed by the Australian government, and it would hardly be right to expose their good or bad actions to the world. With these few words I am happy to inform the reader that my sketches are, for the present, brought to an end, but I hope at some future time to resume them, and publish a second series of "Adventures in Australia."

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